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STORIES



DAUGHTER
OF THE
NIGHT

by
RICHARD
S. SHAVER

THE RED DWARF FIGHTS THE SORCERER QUEEN

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[AMORC]

San Jose

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Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley illustrating a scene from "Daughter of the Night."

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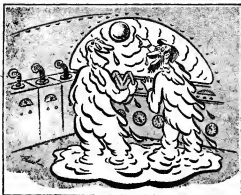
The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

OUR big surprise for this month is the new story by Richard Shaver. By now you've seen the title of the story on the cover, so no doubt you're very anxious to get right at the story. And we don't blame you one bit—because it's really a terrific yarn. Dick had a yarn in our companion magazine, *Fantastic Adventures*, some time back entitled, "The Tale of the Red Dwarf." Well, this new story is something of a sequel to that popular story, and we liked it so much that we stole it away from FA and put it in this month's AS lineup. You'll meet the Red Dwarf again, and a sinister Sorceress Queen. There's a thrill on every page, with all of the terrific mood and suspense that Dick always gets in his work. We'll bet you'll really rave about this yarn!

THEN, of course, there's the third, and concluding installment of Howard Browne's great new Tharn novel, "The Return of Tharn." When you finish reading the last line you'll feel only one regret—that the story had to end! This last installment is really loaded with thrills, as Tharn battles his way to the side of his beloved Dylara, and brings justice to her cruel abductors. All we've got to say is that we hope Howard won't wait another two or three years before he writes a new Tharn story. What do you readers say about that?



"First time in history that anyone ever flew this close to the sun!"

ALEXANDER BLADE returns this month with a unique story entitled, "The Plotters." We can't tell you a word about this yarn without giving away the story. All we'll say is that Alex has come up with a really fine piece of writing, and we'll beat you to the punch by congratulating him right here and now!

IT'S also a pleasure to bring back Craig Brown—this month with another unique story. "Tillie" is both the title and the name of a charming character. Again we feel that to tell you very much here would spoil the story for you. But you know enough of Craig to know that a story carrying his byline is something in the order of a treat. O.k., don't let us stop you—start reading!

ROG PHILLIPS, one of your all-time top favorites, is back too this month. (Really a stellar lineup if we ever saw one!) Rog offers a swell little short, entitled, "The Unthinking Destroyer." You'll get a big kick out of this yarn, and maybe it will make you do a little thinking after you finish reading it. Of course, we can say that of all of Rog's work. Rog has that unique ability of combining the known with the unknown, and leaving plenty of food for thought afterward. So get set for some pleasant reading with Rog's new story. Let us know how you liked it.

FINISHING up the issue is H. B. Hickey's new story, "Beyond The Thunder." This is the story of an invasion from an alien world. A world of strange thunderous sounds—thunder that kills. All we'll say is that for mile-a-minute reading, and for thrills and chills galore, you'll have to go a long way to beat Hickey's offering for this month.

OR MAYBE you won't have to at that. Just keep your eyes peeled for the next issue of your favorite magazine! We've got a galaxy of great yarns coming up. Stories that for sheer excitement, and the best in science-fantasy fiction, just can't be beat. So with that pleasant thought in mind we'll close up shop for now and be seeing you next month.....Rap

THE VANISHED CREWMEN



By HILARY COWEN



The strange story of the ill-fated *Marie Celeste*

A MILLION words have been written, a thousand investigations have been conducted, ten thousand speculations have been made—all about what happened to the crewmen of the *Marie Celeste*. The facts are simply these: the brig was found afloat in the South Atlantic in perfect condition, with food and water aboard and perfectly ready to be sailed or navigated anywhere. There was not a human soul aboard her, however, and all the lifeboats were still on the ship!

Naturally such an event was not left unnoticed and dozens of theories were advanced as to what happened to the persons aboard the *Marie Celeste*. Nothing that the human mind could think of, could provide a reason for all the people leaving the vessel when apparently there was no reason whatsoever for it. Disease, storm, piracy—all these could not have been. Reams of paper have been covered in spite of this with ideas of what happened to the persons aboard what appeared to all outward intents and purposes, a perfectly normal ship.

It is not possible to give any explanation that will satisfy everyone on this matter. And even if such an explanation was available there would be no way of proving whether or not it was the real one. A flurry of excitement was caused a few years back when an hypothesis was offered to explain what the cause of the strange disappearance was. A New England newspaper, the *New Bedford Courier* (now defunct), ran an interview with a retired sea captain, John Lawson Rames, concerning the matter.

Captain Rames, it was said, despite his advanced age at the time of the interview, was a lively, interesting personality who seemed to enjoy everything. By his connection with the sea and his consequent knowledge of navigation, he became interested in astronomy. The article made it plain that his interest in this subject was of the orthodox variety, not embellished by any devotion to what we would call science-fiction.

The article described Captain Rames' education and later career at sea—he was the captain of a tramp steamer for twenty-eight years—and stressed the fact that he had been an acute observer all his life. He had even contributed several articles to the National Geographic Society.

The story that he told which has a bearing on the mystery of the *Marie Celeste* was essentially this: On the morning of December 10, 1903, he

(Captain Rames) was on the bridge of his vessel staring into the darkness. He estimated the time as about 2:30 A.M. The only other person on the bridge was the second mate who was acting as helmsman. Rames said that unfortunately the second mate was not a witness of what followed.

The ship was in mid-Atlantic headed eastward. The sky was clear and visibility excellent. The only other thing on the surface of the sea was a small schooner-rigged vessel about three miles off the starboard bow. Rames said that he was idly watching this vessel when the incident occurred for which he has no real explanation, yet which may be an explanation in itself of something greater. He was casually watching the dim outlines of the schooner, fairly well visible because of the starlight and the general clarity of the night. His eye was caught suddenly by something unusual that was apparently happening at the side of the schooner. A cylindrical-shaped object lay at the side of the vessel—that was all. More than this Captain Rames refused to admit. All that he actually saw was this object. He ventured no guesses as to what it might have been. It was merely a cylinder. In size he could only guess again—perhaps twenty or thirty feet in diameter and three times as long.

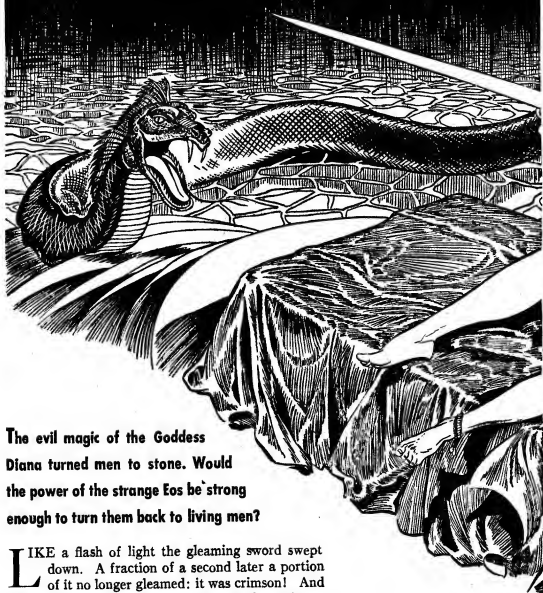
He watched the ship and the strange object associated with it for a long time. He made no comment to the helmsman nor did the second mate see it, which at the time made Rames happy that he had not mentioned it for fear he would be called "touched."

On the evidence implied by this observation, the interview went on to suggest that this was a submarine, or perhaps even a spaceship and that the people were transferred from this vessel to the craft, though Rames again made it clear that he never heard anything about the vessel mentioned. That something similar might have happened to the *Marie Celeste*, of course, we are immediately tempted to believe.

The trouble is, naturally, that the evidence and even the data are so flimsy, providing us with the merest skeleton about which we can weave our flesh of fantasy. One is inclined to doubt that Captain Rames saw anything, much less that what he might have seen suggests an answer to the mystery of the *Marie Celeste*. It is the belief of a number of people who are acquainted with and interested in these events, that stranger and less believable suggestions have been offered. Until such appears, that cannot be doubted, let us hold our minds open.

DAUGHTER OF THE NIGHT

By RICHARD S. SHAVER



The evil magic of the Goddess
Diana turned men to stone. Would
the power of the strange Eos be strong
enough to turn them back to living men?

LIKE a flash of light the gleaming sword swept down. A fraction of a second later a portion of it no longer gleamed; it was crimson! And Queen Dionaea's head bounced down the stairway into her garden of live oaks. A few seconds of thought remained to it before it would be very



Like a flash of light the gleaming sword swept down

dead; but her thought was confused by shock—her eyes rolled uncontrollably while she tried to remember some can-trap or rune from her long association with the Goddess Diana. Desperately she tried to recite the proper abracadabra to stay the swift death that was sweeping through her mind; but it is hard for a head to chant a charm with no body to draw a breath . . .

Druga, his job of execution finished, sheathed his bloody sword and turning, stalked away. Thus it was that he did not see the amazing thing that happened in the gloom of the ancient live oaks . . .

Baena was a serpent, a huge river of strength up to his giant head, and he lived among the mighty branches of the oaks. Being a serpent, Baena was far from equal to a human being in his brainpower, but even his dim perception told him that harm had come to his one and only benefactress—and that meant harm to him, too, for Queen Dionaea had always cared for the needs of his stomach. Through her he ate and lived. Without her, he would die. And so, he glided rapidly down from the trunk of his favorite tree and emerged into the paths of the garden just as Dionaea's bleeding head rolled out from the base of the steps.

Baena coiled his length protectingly about Dionaea. For an instant he was at a loss, noting her horribly desperate attempts to speak without breath, her mouth opening and closing and her tongue licking snake-like in and out.

Baena realized after a moment that there was no hope for the Queen to go on living. A head must have a body.

Glancing about, Baena saw nothing but the numerous coils of *his own body*, and after an instant's hesitation, he took his tail in his mouth up to the tenth joint and bit it off! Shrinking along all his length with the terrible

necessity that faced him, Baena quickly slapped the bloody stump of his tail fast to the bleeding neck of Dionaea and said one of the few magic spells he could remember . . .

TURNING his body slowly until his severed nerves told his spine that the connections were as accurate as could be expected, Baena waited while the spell slowly took effect. He lay there all night, waiting for his own life's blood to reanimate the mind of Dionaea.

As Dionaea came back to her senses, Baena began to experience the strange phenomena of wanting to go two ways at once, and as the phenomena became more and more troublesome, he decided that he had better have an understanding with Dionaea once and for all. But what poor male ever won an argument with a woman?

Thus it was that Baena resigned himself to a life of traveling backward, and that was that.

As a snake, he wished only to eat and bask in his favorite tree, but as Dionaea, he wanted only one thing—and that with all the fervor of hate a sorceress is capable of—a fitting revenge on the man who had visited her execution upon her!

Day and night Dionaea plotted, and in her mind a fitting revenge grew—it would include the lovely Feronia, Druga's beloved . . . Carefully she prepared the incantation.

It is here that my story really begins. What has happened, and how it happened is of little consequence to what is to come—except perhaps to introduce you to the characters. It is very simple. Dionaea was a very evil sorceress, and Druga, most heroic of men, had long sought to bring her into his power, and to end her evil days. Armed with the white magic of Feronia,

his loved one, who was also a sorceress, but one who worked her charms only for the good of mankind, he had tracked Dionaea to her castle, and there slain her. Or he would have, had it not been for Baena, the serpent . . .

What is past is past. It is best not to think of it. There is much in the past of all of us that would need a long, tiresome explanation to a newcomer, and you are newcomers. To explain all of the past to everyone would be an impossible task. You need know only that Druga, champion of mankind; and his lovely Feronia, face now the most awful menace of their lives, and unknowing of it, too, for thinking their arch enemy slain!

Where do all our characters live? In Fantasia, a land far away. A land where wondrous things always happen. It is of one of the most wondrous adventures of all that you are about to hear now—let the past lie, cold and dead as it is, and come with me into the present, and into *danger!*

Who am I? Does it make any difference? If you must know, I am the Red Dwarf, and I have seen and recorded *everything!* I was there, and if you can but understand, everything has happened *because* I was there! If it were not so, how could you be sure what I tell is true? For it *is* true . . .

IT WAS evening. As Druga and Feronia sat talking, before retiring, the horror fell upon them.

Feronia's hair fell like a living torrent to fondle her gleaming shoulders and toy everywhere with the strangely electric invisible vitality of her glowing skin. Her eyes were molten pools, dark and liquid as the waters of the lost caverns, and the brows above them were mystic lines of beauty left by the touch of a raven wing. Her generous mouth was smiling the wondrous lovely

magic that was Feronia, red as a newborn rose, dewy and waiting for Druga. Her capable hands were soft with expecting him, and cooler than the moss beneath the fern.

Her breasts were as naked as sun-bleached coral, white as a cloud in a summer sky, white as truth, white as her own teeth laughing tantalizingly at him.

Quite suddenly, shockingly, her lovely figure became transfused with a vile, interloping energy that struck at Druga's sensitivities with a sickening piercingness, so that he sprang to his feet in fear.

Standing there helplessly, Druga watched the evil energy transform the strong, deep breasted beauty of his Feronia, change her devilishly and subtly and gradually before his suffering eyes.

The white magic of her body became transfused with dark, throbbing force, and as she strove to rise and act, Druga saw that she could not move her limbs in any way!

Before his eyes her skin turned black as ebony, her eyes became stony and fixed; even the sweet curling of her hair became hard and solid, her whole body became changed to black, hated stone.

As suddenly as the horrible pulsing had come, it went away, leaving Druga that least of all desirable women, one of virtuous stone.

So with one stroke Dionaea repaid Druga and Feronia; Druga by the loss of his best beloved, and Feronia by the retention of her faculties in a body of stone. That Feronia had to sit immovable and watch poor Druga in his grief and loss was particularly excruciating.

Days of horror dragged by.

No matter what he proposed to do upon arising, mid-morning found him reclining before the frozen statue-like body of his beloved, and night would

come down at last to hide the black stone of Feronia from his wet eyes.

This existence became at last unbearable, and he resolved to go out into the world and seek some means of making his days less horrible to him. That Feronia was not dead, and that he might have obtained her release by appealing to some greater power, did not occur to Druga in his grief. Indeed he could never become accustomed to the ways of witches and their overlords, nor to thinking in terms of magic at all. He was a logical person, and no matter what wonders he blundered into and saw with his own eyes, he never quite believed any of it.

It was with a heavy heart that Druga sealed up the doors of Feronia's home and made his sad way to the stable, mounted and rode slowly away.

ALL night he rode, not choosing his way, but letting the horse do the thinking, and in the warm sun of late morning lay down to sleep where the horse had led him.

As the days passed in heedless wandering, the deep hurt of his loss lessened, and he began to take note of the road that led ever on and on to he knew not what, except that it beckoned, as paths and highways alike have a way of doing to the traveler.

As his spirits became lighter, he began to take stock of the country through which he passed, and to note all the strange and curious things that hovered always just outside normal vision. They were not hidden from Druga, who had more than ordinary vision, one of Feronia's witch gifts to him, and many a strange fact of life he picked up from the circumambient apparent emptiness.

It was with this far-seeing sense that Druga now noticed a glowing, golden vibrance spreading an invisible, but

terrifically felt glory, all across the northern horizon. He turned the horse's head toward that glory, no more able to avoid the decision than is a moth the flame.

What it was that he sensed he did not surely know, but his memory supplied him with vague and haunting clues which he could not quite drag out into the light of reason. It did not stand to reason, but there it was ahead, the lure of woman augmented by some magic into a glory visible as sunlight, strong as some great whirlpool of energy, drawing him resistlessly on and on.

Many a mile later, Druga came to a point where he could see with his eyes on ahead and into the shining core of that field of golden vibrance.

"One of the universal poles of life!" cried Druga. In his studies Druga had learned that just as the world has a North and South magnetic pole, so does the universe have opposite poles of life-magnetic-energy. One of these is female, and inducts in all life a female nature; the other is male and inducts in all life a male nature, just as the North and South pole induct in all iron and in kindred matter a North and South magnetic pole.

"It is no wonder it draws me, it is the force which makes all life attractive to all other life . . ."

Druga knew that there was no use his trying to resist the attraction any more than a compass could resist pointing north. So he rode onward into the glory, musing that it was strange this universal pole of infinite space should, in its drifting, have crossed his own path upon this planet.

As he neared the center of the increasing ecstasy, Druga's mind and body became cleaned of all desires but one, and that was to reach the exact center and there remain. Along with others, his affection for Feronia was

burned away, leaving him helpless in the grip of this emotion greater by far than any other.

Glory, golden ecstatic glory, poured through him in a titanic flood, and nearer and nearer he came to the shining central core of the mighty field of universal energy.

AS HE came at last to clear vision of the core, he saw floating there a vast, circular disk of golden hue, and upon the disk a tremendous mansion. Beneath the disk was only the shining golden air, and it came to Druga that this mansion must be a singularly pleasant place to live. He cast about for some means of lifting himself across the space of nothingness that separated the dull earth and the shining plane of the disk. So near to the delightful power that drew, and yet so impossible to get nearer because of the nothingness between him and the disk, Druga at last rode on beneath and on to the very center of the shining darkness beneath the great disk.

Now he was truly at the pole and dynamic source of female magnetic attraction! Shaking in every fibre with the blasting force of the terrific center of this universal power, Druga stood, a moth caught up in a whirlpool too great to understand or withstand; and he would have died there after a time, unable to move from the spot.

But overhead the great disk suddenly showed a light, a beam of ruby red that laddered down to him through the golden murk of energy, and above that beam of ruby light he made out a shining form that beckoned to him. Trying to answer the invitation, Druga put out a hand to the red beacon and found it solid to his touch, a rod of crystal, thick as a man's body and with hand-holds and foot-steps hewn into it. He got off the horse and ascended the

weird ladder toward the shining being who beckoned.

A woman divinely tall and with hair like ripened wheat, modelled of hammered sunlight, her glowing flesh surcharged with the infinite female energies of the Universal Pole, met him at the topmost step of the ladder.

He stepped out into the halls of the mansion by her side, unable to speak with the ecstasy that poured from her. For such was the nature of that disk, that it concentrated the magnetic flow of the Pole field so that it emanated solely from the body of this woman.

She drew a robe of the purest blue about her glowing body, to insulate and screen off the terrific irresistible force. His mind speculated constantly and intriguingly on what would happen to him if she should desire him and cast off this protective robe?

SO THINKING, Druga walked beside her vital beauty, noting the deep lagoons of her eyes upon him, curious, blue as the sea, shaded by long lashes of dusky amber shielding from him some deep wisdom that she must keep from him just yet. Try as he might he could not plumb the swirling depths within her mind. Reach as he would he could find there nothing to read but pictured vastnesses of strange beauty and violent passions strongly withheld, nooks and crannies of mysterious, unreadable thought far beyond his understanding to interpret. His senses turned away from the inner mysterious glory of her mind, and his eyes came to rest on her lips, crimson arches riper than tropic flowers, moist as with desire, wide and capable and smiling upon him with a woman's will to captivate twinkling all along the crimson outline of her smile. Behind her lips her teeth gleamed, almost avid, parted in a hunger that he did not then care to

CHAPTER II

understand. Her breasts were ripe and full, beneath the blue, shielding robe, her waist a column of cunningly tapered ivory rounding into hips and thighs of masterful curves, moving with mysterious woman magic beneath the vaguely transparent shimmer of her robe.

Druga stared into the blue lagoons of her eyes, and at last asked what was closest to his heart.

"Who and what are you, who lives here at the summit of female attraction in all the universe?"

"In ancient times, many were the men who were alive enough to sense this pole and come questing to me as the moth to the flame. But in these times, who are you to sense the mighty energy of the Universal Pole and be drawn here to me?"

"I am Druga, and I am sad and bereft, and I wander seeking death as much as life. If the name tells you anything, you are welcome to the information. I am no immortal. Are you then one of those who do not die?"

"I have been called by many names in the past, but men sometimes remember me as Aurora. Others have called me Eos."

"A fool is easily convinced, immortal Eos. But though I have not lived long, I have learned that appearances are deceiving and not to be trusted. How do I know that I am not out of my mind, and this place and yourself but delusions?"

"You *are* in a state, aren't you? You must tell me all about it; there will be plenty of time. For there is no way for a man to leave here of his own will."

"What became of all those visitors you tell me came here in the old time?"

Eos laughed loudly, a clear ringing laugh.

"Perhaps you had better worry about that, Druga! What do you suppose could have happened to them?"

EOS led him into a great feasting chamber, and Druga saw there a great host of men sitting, as to a feast, side by side.

Each one of them was of solid black stone. The fact struck Druga's mind with a terrible impact. With a face like thunder he said:

"So it was you who turned my Feronia to stone, to drag me here to you by your spells, and then when you tire of me to turn me likewise into stone?"

The woman recoiled from his murderous rage, crying out in a shocked voice, a voice of virtue unjustly accused:

"Surely you don't think that I had anything to do with this? These men are the curse an enemy has put upon me; and every creature that I ever loved she has turned into stone soon or late and left me here alone forever. There is no cruelty like the cruelty of Diana Triformis."

The rage passed slowly from Druga, and left him weak and glad that his hands had not found their way to that glorious throat, as they had seemed about to do. For here was a woman who had suffered the same loss as he.

"Eos, we must take thought together, for it seems we have a common enemy. My own Feronia, a woman such as was only created by the Gods once in all Time, was turned into similar black stone before my eyes not long ago. We have a common enemy, and we must find a remedy for this curse she puts upon us. Else I will go through life as you have gone, with everything pleasant removed from it."

The artful eyes of Eos softened, and that mystery living in their depths lightened, her arms became soft pillars of the temple of her beauty as she low-

ered herself into the big chair at the head of that gloomy feasting board of death. Druga picked up the big body of one of the stone figures, carried it lightly to the side of the hall, and set it there on a bench. Then he took the vacant place at the board beside the queen of the palace of the dead.

Druga related to Eos all the events that had transpired since the lopping off of Dionaea's head. She surmised, as did he, that this deed was the one that had led Diana to turn the spell of the black stone loose upon Druga as upon Eos.

"There must be found a way of turning the spells of this Goddess into harmless attempts," said Druga. "We cannot sit here and wait for her cruelty to work us greater harm. What can we do?"

"I have had long long years to plan a revenge upon her, but nothing I have been able to do has had any effect," Eos said.

THE desire that Druga could no more help than he could help breathing, looking upon the pole of all desire that shone its energies through the flesh of Eos, now spoke, and Druga said with a tongue that was thick:

"Then, Eos, the very next time that Diana happens to think of you, I too will become stone, and if we are to have joy of each other, we had better have it soon, before I become as these others you have loved."

Eos looked at him sadly, her lips glistening with an unearthly dew and her eyes shining like chained lightnings.

"It was that thought that betrayed me every time, Druga. Each of those men said much those same words to me when he learned the fate that awaited him, and for each of them my heart turned to water and we spent our time in dalliance instead of spending our en-

ergies trying to overcome the work of my enemy.

"For each of them I tried to give all there was of pleasure while they yet had breath, as one tries to give water to a man about to die of fever. I was only that much more hurt by their death—for such giving of the self opens one to the deepest pangs of parting.

"That is the agony Diana designed for me, and she has done this to me since that time I brought a young man to her island that was sacred to her only. This time, Druga, there will be none of that for us; we will try some other medicine than love for each other against this evil. Work, we will try!"

"There speaks my dead Feronia," murmured Druga, sadly. And for thought of her he forgot to feel the denial of his desire for the body of this woman, a body filled with the energies of the whole Universal Pole of female magnetism. That he should lose that glory was nothing beside the pang he felt at thought of Feronia; and the wise Eos smiled to note that this man had not forgotten his love even in the face of her infinite attraction.

"If we went back to Feronia's home, might it not be that her work would give you some inkling of how Diana might be overcome?" Druga was thoughtful.

"I can only try," Eos answered him. "We will go there. I will examine her work and her notes, and you will show me her laboratories that I have heard of even here. Together, we might get an answer."

EOS got up from the board, and went to a small chamber at the edge of the disk. There her hands sent the disk slanting upward into the sky. As they left the center of the pole of animal magnetism, Eos' body and face changed subtly. Druga was released from the

power of the pole's attraction, and whether that was a good thing or not he could not say, except that every atom of his body wanted to return there to that place and remain.

"How is it, Eos, that the pole does not repel your female nature as it attracts the male? Would it not repel an ordinary woman so that she could not approach it?"

"In that you are wrong, Druga. The nature of this life-energy is not the same as ordinary iron magnetism. Like poles do not repel, but are unaffected. It is in fact only invigorating to me, making me stronger. So it would be if you were at the other end of the universe. At the male pole you would be vastly invigorated, not repelled. Do you understand?"

"It is only sad that the poles lie at opposite ends of the universe," murmured Druga, looking askance at Eos.

"Whatever might you be thinking, Druga? If such power arced between man and woman they would be consumed!"

"But what a death, what a death," murmured Druga. Her sudden laughter rang through the hall of death incongruously, and at the sound they fell silent again and did not speak for thinking of the corpses waiting there for what would never come.

"How many men has Diana and her friends killed through the years? Enough to populate a couple of planets, I should say?"

"Diana? With her bow and arrows alone she used to account for a good many; and later, as she learned more evil arts, there was no record kept. She has been a most evil goddess, yet men worship her."

"Why? A goddess that kills a man for seeing her is a fiend! And her maidens may not see a man, either. It is a strange life she leads, for a true

woman. She must be other than female."

"That could be, Druga," murmured Eos.

THE morning sun glittered from the streams and from the little glass foot-bridge that shimmered magically across and up in a great arc to the door in the side of the cliff. Eos sighed at the beauty.

"This wife of yours was a housekeeper, I note, with an eye for art."

"Her art and her work were always first, Eos. She was an uncommon hard woman to get used to, but she made a man of me."

"That I can see," agreed Eos, and Druga looked at her twice to know what she meant. "You owe everything to Feronia, according to you, and nothing to yourself."

"Very little, Goddess. But I do not exaggerate, she was . . ."

"Well, never mind it now. I grow weary of Feronia this and Feronia that. I will judge for myself whether she understood you or no."

"She was extremely understanding," said Druga.

DAYS passed, and much hard work, Eos studying the laboratory notes of Feronia, and Druga himself reading them over and trying to think of some way he himself might strike back at their mutual enemy.

"Nothing that she has developed can be used directly against Diana without her surviving to fight back. This would have been fatal to Dionaea, but after all, as you have said—she is dead."

"She ought to be dead, I cut her head off!"

"That usually does the trick."

They decided to leave the laboratory the next morning, and that evening Druga picked up the stone statue of his

Feronia and carried it carefully aboard the disk, placing her there—one woman among the thousand-odd dead heroes of the long dead past. Druga sadly made a place for her at the head of the board. He did not think of it, but Feronia now sat where Eos herself had spent many a sad hour, sitting and gazing at her dead lovers.

With the stone Feronia gone, the vast and multiplex-walled chambers of mystery and magic assumed a new atmosphere, and Druga found himself talking to Eos that night as if he was not a man whose heart was dead.

She sat in the place from which he had removed the black stone body of Feronia, and Druga could not help but compare the glowing life of her with the dead thing that had sat there.

The hammered sunlight of her hair made curls and waves of beauty about the white shores of her shoulders. She had let the robe of insulative blue drop from her, exposing the very heart of her beauty he had feared to see when she was herself filled with the flow of the Pole of Life Energy. And Druga wondered a little whether she were not still somehow the center and pivot of the energy, for his senses reeled with looking, and his will crumbled into forgotten ashes. He sank to the silken couch beside her, and his eyes burned with flashing energies like meteors plunging into the Northern lights.

Eos held her breath, and her eyes burned into his with greater and greater force, for she had been dreaming and weeping and waiting there at the Pole-of-all-Life for so many cold empty years—waiting for the curse to be lifted so that she could begin to live again.

WITH the last shred of her own will Eos murmured: "Let us go into the disk and leave at once for Armora, and think no more of each

other or surely we will sink into the raptures we desire and forget to fight. Then I will awake and find you too turned into stone, and myself again alone against her. I have been unable to fight alone."

"If that is your will, do not fail to shield your beauty with that robe you wear. For I cannot resist the power in your loveliness any more than a straw in the wind!"

Eos closed the robe against his gaze, and like two people weighted down with lead in every limb, they got up and went out of the darkened chambers, and Druga closed the great doors and locked them. Silently, not touching each other, they walked down the bridge of glass.

They entered the mansion on the disk, and Eos sent it sharply upward. There was blood on her lower lip where she had bit it, and Druga's nails had bitten into his palms.

Druga noted that the great golden glow in the sky had approached near to the valley that Feronia had made her home, and he said:

"This pole of life seems to follow you about! Is there some relation between you and it, so that you cannot be apart?"

Eos looked at him, smiling sadly, her eyes far-off with other thoughts.

"I have been taught, in the far past, that there was a Mother of Life, a real woman, mighty and majestic beyond thinking, who lived there at the pole and ordered life to be as it should be. That she is my ancestor, and that there is some relation between the life energies and myself, may be true, Druga. Whether the pole follows me, or whether coincidence is governed by some magic so that we are never far apart, I know not. Knowledge is a thing now lost from life, as we know it, Druga. We can only guess at these

truths, and never learn them surely."

"Now you are not telling me all you know, Eos."

"I would not tell you what I only guess, Druga. And I do not surely know anything, any more. I have spent so much time brooding and alone."

"Forgive me, Eos. An eagle cannot fly with crows, and I will never again put myself forward. When you have need of me, I will be here, and when you need only your own thoughts, why then go apart; I will not seek you out. I forget who and what you are, for my senses are strained beyond endurance with the power of you."

"You are no crow, Druga. But in me is an adult mind, and you are as a child, whom I must teach and raise up gradually to my estate. Every parent grows impatient of ignorance in their offspring. One day, if time keeps treading the self-same mill, we will be crushed together like grapes and pressed clean. Until then, be my knight, and think not of me, except with pity for the broken heart that beats inside me."

Druga did not look at her more, but went in and sat at the board where the thousand dead stared, each stony eye broodingly centered upon the spot where he had placed Feronia. And as Druga's eye likewise centered upon that seat that had been the scene of a thousand deaths, he felt a wave of anger from the stony body of Feronia, and a sense of guilt came over him. He felt remorse that he should forget her and desire Eos. If he had known that those eyes were not dead, but seeing and remembering all that passed before them, he would have been shivering with fear of her anger. But Druga did not know. Yet it seemed to his senses that each of those eyes was likewise angry with him, and he got up in haste from that table of dead men and one

dead woman, and went and drank wine by himself until sleep came.

WITH the first rays of morning light Eos woke him, and Druga learned that she had lowered the disk over the garden of live-oaks beside the palace of Dionaea, and Druga looked out. No one was yet astir; they had not yet been seen. Druga and Eos descended by the ladder of ruby glass, and went side by side through the garden and Druga took the stairs he knew well up to the sleeping chamber of Dionaea. For in the many-locked cabinets of that chamber were her many acquisitions of magical apparatus, and if anything was there that would help them, they meant to find it.

As they entered the room, opening the door with a pick-lock, Eos cried out in a triumphant voice:

"We are not in vain. The Queen is not dead, Druga!"

The sleepy-eyed Dionaea poked her head above the covers at the sound of their entry. At sight of them, she hissed like a great snake, and writhed the long hideous body of Baena free of the encumbrance of the quilts, and Baena reared his own hideous, fanged head up beside Dionaea's.

Druga stood astonished to see the fabled Amphis-Baena here in the bed of Dionaea, and with the head of Dionaea! A great laugh broke from him to see the reptilian change the grafting had wrought in Dionaea's beauty.

Dionaea did not say anything, but Baena coiled swiftly on the bed and struck out full length, his fangs meeting in Druga's arm. Druga felt the terrible venom, like fire in his veins, and seized the great serpent-head in his two hands, squeezing in terrible anger. But Eos seized him.

"No, do not kill her! Carry her into the disk, and make her captive. I have

conceived of a way of conquering Diana, and we need this creature alive."

Druga wrapped the great body around and around his body and arm, seizing the neck of Dionaea in one hand and the neck of Baena in the other. So burdened, he staggered down the steps and up again into the disk, and the trip took him a good hour, for Baena twisted loose and tried to flee, and he wrestled and fell from the ladder, and only succeeded by tying the writhing pillar of strength into a bow-knot and pulling it up into the ship with a rope.

MEANWHILE, the people of Armora had awakened from the tumult, and crowded everywhere about the gardens, getting underfoot and wondering loudly what this was all about. Eos hurried from the bed chamber of their Queen with a great bundle of material she had selected as of possible future use. They tried to stop her, but one glance of the potent magnetic power that flamed from her great eyes sent them all to their knees in worshipful, helpless adoration.

Druga, waiting above with the snake wound round with ropes and lashed to the pillars, watched this evidence of her powers with awe, for he had himself but narrowly escaped the swords of the guards, and had been about to plunge down the ladder with his own sword in a futile attempt to rescue Eos.

She sent the disk spinning upward in flight, and Druga took himself from her and went and sat by the writhing, fettered body of the Amphis-Baena, or Dionaea-Baena, or two-headed snake, saying to her as she spat venom at him:

"Listen to me, Dionaea, the best thing you can do for yourself is to try to win the favor of Eos. She is an enemy who has suffered as greatly as yourself from the work of Diana, and

would help you if you earned it, to acquire a human body again. I think the snake himself would like that better too. He is too greatly married, I would say, to relish the state overmuch."

Baena relaxed at these words, and ceased to struggle. Then in great snake hisses, he made himself heard.

"Dionaea, I think too you should seize this opportunity to get out of this fix we are in. I gave you my tail to roost upon as a temporary measure, not as a permanent part of my future. Diana, whom we both serve, could have released us if she had been so inclined, and fixed us up with separate bodies, but she chose not."

That Dionaea was considering his words was evident. She ceased to spit at him, and composed her face into thought. Druga leaned back and smiled.

Eos brought the disk to rest again at the meadow at the foot of the glass bridge before Feronia's cliff palace, and came in to them. She stood gazing at the two-headed creature trussed to the pillars of the chamber. Feronia gazed at them with her stone eyes, and all the men gazed at Feronia as if transfixed by her stony beauty, and the sight made Dionaea shiver with apprehension. For she thought that these were people who had angered Eos and that Eos had changed them into stone. She wondered why Eos had added Feronia to the collection.

CHAPTER III

EOS sat beside Feronia and watched the great, writhing two-headed Dionaea, and waited. After a time the flowing golden bands of Life-energy entered, focusing subtly all about her, so that she seemed to Dionaea truly to be the Mother of All, and the greatest of All Goddesses anywhere.

At the entrance of the golden energy Eos smiled with relief, for now she had a power that she had not thought to use against Diana before. For to Eos this aversion to all men of the Goddess Diana spelled out the message of her weakness, and this energy of the life pole was going to pierce that weakness.

Day dragged after day, and the weird scene there in the banquet hall of the stone men of the past became to Druga a tense place of waiting for his own demise and change into a similar relic to decorate this hall of death. For Eos would not tell him what she planned for fear he would give her away in the tense moments that were to come when Diana at last rejoined her Dionaea in their strange dual existence.

The inducted energies of the female pole had a most disturbing effect upon the mingled male and female of the Amphis-Baena.

Baena, driven half mad by the increased female qualities of the head of Dionaea, made inadvertent love to her, caressing her face with his long forked tongue, and combing at her tangled hair with his fangs, always Baena was distraught with her attraction. This attention drove the woman near frantic, strained as she was in her unnatural condition, and she could not afford to anger the beast whose body she had been grafted upon. For even a serpent has been known to swallow its tail, and Dionaea had no desire to know if Baena could do that trick.

Eos, sitting quietly and watching the bound serpent, smiled at this continual **by-play**, and offered to release Dionaea for revealing her knowledge of Diana, so that some chink in her armor might be found. Not that Eos now needed any such thing, but she was kind-hearted, and wanted Baena at least on her side. For she could see into the dual life and thought of the two-headed

monster, and knew that if Baena chose to set his will against Diana when she was within the body and mind of Dionaea—it would help her in what she planned.

"Baena," Eos at last said, "if you can find a way to help me against this unnatural mistress of your mistress, I will repay you by giving you anything you may ask of me."

Baena looked at Dionaea's head with the reptilian love-light glowing frustrate in his great green-and-gold eyes.

"If you will promise to give me what is in my mind that I desire, why then when the time comes I will see what I can do. I am weary of being the tail when I was meant to be the head, and if I had it to do over, this unnatural and self-willed appendage would remain in her proper place."

Now Eos knew that Baena could not help desiring Dionaea as a mate, for she seemed most reptilian in the strange snake-growth that had come over her, and knowingly she nodded at Baena, so that he knew that she knew what he wanted, but Dionaea did not know, for it never occurred to her. To Eos, what the future might bring to Dionaea as the mate of a snake seemed a proper revenge for what she had done in aiding Diana, and for other cruelties of which Druga had told her. She planned accordingly.

CAME that day which was the time appointed by Diana Triformis for her visit to Dionaea. Much as she detested the need for entering the male body of Baena to interview Dionaea, still Dionaea had been a valuable ally, and Diana did intend in time to release her and give her again a human body.

To this end she had made some inquiries as to how this might be done. For in truth the method of doing so had evaded her mind in the excitement and

rage of finding what had happened, and in the task of the spell she had created to turn Feronia into a stone image. For Diana knew that what Baena had accomplished she could accomplish, certainly, and the shame of forgetting how it might be done before the wise Baena's critical eyes made her neglect to mention her intentions to either of the two heads of the snake.

As the swirl of ethereal force that was Diana's traveling form settled within the golden-moted atmosphere of the great chamber of the disk-mansion, Eos stood up, and dropped from her body her insulative blue robe of shimmering magic, so that her supercharged beauty shone everywhere in blinding, awful attraction.

Druga, who had been sitting disconsolately talking to himself, rose to his feet like an automaton and walked toward that more than mortal beauty, his eyes blinded and his senses wholly submerged in ecstasy at the sight of the glory of Eos unveiled. As he reached the Goddess he put out his arms like a sleepwalker to take her to him, but she avoided him, seizing him by a wrist and turning him about, hissing in his ear, imperatively:

"Now prove to me that you are truly a mighty man of his word, with courage and strength, and in spite of this body of mine go out of this chamber and wait till I call without once letting your attention turn toward me or noting anything that goes on, else are we both lost!"

Like a man weighted down with lead on his feet, Druga strove to obey her, moving inch by slow inch away from that vast flood of energetic attraction.

Eos watched him move slowly away from her, every muscle standing out on his body and his neck corded with effort to keep his head turned away, and a vast admiration for him rose in her

throat and choked her. It seemed to her that the statue of Feronia moved and that the stone face changed, suffused for an instant with admiration also.

THE swirling purple cloud of Diana's entrance moved nearer to Dionaea, for in the hyper-space of her travelling, the points and dimensions of this world were much alike, and she did not realize that Dionaea was not in her palace at Armora. Settling about the two-headed creature lashed fast to the pillars of the chamber, she moved herself within the snake body and came to rest within the body of Baena, the snake.

Looking out of the dual heads of Dionaea and Baena now, Diana Triformis, who was no stranger to dual and triple existence even in the same body, saw with those four eyes the naked body of Eos, reflecting, emanating, giving off in vast floods the focused energies of the Pole of Female Life-energy, and those four eyes fastened hypnotized upon that glory, female beyond any other life in all space.

Eos moved closer and closer to the bound snake, murmuring soft words:

"Oh, Diana, wonderful one, long have I desired you, for I know your secret, that you are not female as your body seems, but male. So I have decided to have you for myself, for I am weary of men, and want only the boy Diana himself for my love, forever. Come to me, Diana, and dwell with me here at the pole of love, and never leave me. Can you not see that the enmity that has sprung up between us is the result of misunderstood love!"

Now Baena, seeing his opportunity, thrust his own male personality to the fore, trying to sway the intricate balance of sexes in the weird self of Diana—and with his mind and his eyes upon Eos, made himself to desire that infi-

nite female attraction, which was not hard, so as to add that much weight to the attraction which even a God might not resist unless, as Druga had done, he turned his back upon it.

Diana could *not* turn her back, and the whole sudden surprise of finding herself not in the palace in Armora, but here in the halls of her erstwhile enemy, Eos of the Dawn-light, made her natural male attributes become dominant so that she desired Eos mightily.

Trapped thus by the circumstances, the lashed serpent body of Baena which insisted upon gazing steadily at the vast and overwhelming beauty of the unveiled body of Eos, and by the ignorance of Dionaea as to what was going on, by her own masculine nature into desiring this essence of all female attraction, Diana gazed upon Eos while the energies sent by Eos' skill coursed in greater and greater ecstasy through her.

SO IT was that Diana fell in love with Eos, as Eos desired, and with the Gods, love is an overmastering passion that may not be resisted.

Now Eos and the trapped spirit of Diana conversed together, and at the subtle words of Eos and the overmastering attraction, Diana swirled out of the body of Baena and settled engrossed about the glowing glory that was Eos. Inward she was drawn, and mated there in mysterious communion with the Goddess.

"If you but had a strong male body, Diana, we could live here forever in love and ecstasy. Why not return one of the stone men of the past into flesh again, become a man instead of half-woman as in the past—and so learn anew to live and love differently and gloriously . . ."

Such were Eos' words, made potent

by the golden glowing energies within her, swaying the bemused Diana to her will. And Diana, with Eos' hands, went to the wall cabinets and set out certain magical apparatus, brewing an antidote for the stony seizure she had sent to Eos' lovers in the past. This liquid she poured over the male of stone that Eos selected, and even as the stone man stirred and quickened into life again, her ethereal self whirled out of Eos and settled into the reanimated flesh of the man.

When he arose to his feet and spoke, it was Diana herself who spoke and not the man who had loved Eos long ago. What this desecration of her past love meant to Eos we shall not know, for she hid it beneath languishing glances and subtle swayings of her body, drawing Diana to her, wrapping her arms about the reanimated being, and walking with the new male Diana out of the room and so to her own chambers.

DRUGA, as Eos had foreseen, had been unable to contain his curiosity as to what was going on, and had at last peered from the hallway where he waited, just in time to see the purple swirl that was Diana settle into and seem to reanimate the ancient long-dead stone image.

The emotions natural to a man rose in him. He was not sure just what he was seeing, but jealousy rose in him like a flame, and his passion so steadfastly controlled and so rewarded by the fickle Eos made this jealousy into a terrible, red rage against her who had withheld herself from him only to give herself to her worst enemy in the form of a man.

Druga, overcome with this jealous rage, strode out into the banquet hall of dead men, took from the side of one of the dead men a great war-axe of

bronze, and hefting it in his hand as if it were a trembling feather plume, strode after the two figures like the wrath of God.

As Eos reclined sensuously upon her couch in her sleeping chamber, and Diana in the man's body stretched beside her, bending back Eos' head and planting there a burning kiss, Druga entered, and standing over the pair like an outraged husband, shouted in a voice he was unable to make articulate.

"Of all contemptible females, you two are the most . . ."

So saying, and mouthing his disgust with a tongue that frothed with rage, Druga seized the reanimated man with one hand by the shoulder and flung him half across the room, whirling up the axe to send it through him from curly head to gold-bossed sword belt.

Eos cried out in feigned fear and anguish, for she had expected this development, and it was but one phase of the weapon-array she planned to overcome the powers of Diana. For she knew Druga, and that he would be able to act in no other way if he observed what was going on.

BUT the body of the man was equipped with a sword of antique but sturdy length, and Diana had time to sweep this formidable weapon from its scabbard and turn aside the down plummeting axe, so that it struck a great shower of sparks from the strange golden metal of the floor.

Druga, his rage unabated, only swung the axe aloft again, parrying Diana's thrust with the haft of it, and then as she ducked his next blow, the great side of the weapon struck her alongside the head; stretching her senseless upon the floor.

Eos, on her feet, had not expected Druga so quickly to knock the goddess unconscious, and indeed the purple

mist of her hyper-space body was already rising from the unconscious form on the floor as Eos threw herself to the wall where a switch hung open, and with her face a glory of triumph, thrust the great handle upward into place.

As the switch closed, a tiny black vortice spun suddenly into being in the center of the room, and within the black swirl was a tiny golden center. Swiftly the black vortice grew until Eos and Druga were pressed against the wall to avoid the clutch of the power of the whirlpool. The purple mist that was Diana was swept along as a whirlpool draws a straw, faster and faster, and a great scream came out of the blackness. Within, the center of the golden core seemed to give a triumphant laugh as the purple mingled there.

For a time Eos and Druga watched the swirling gold and purple sentience mingling and struggling at the center, and as the golden core shone stronger and stronger and at last overcame the purple swirling entity that was Diana, Eos pulled the switch again open, and the black vortice of space-force lessened and finally disappeared.

That intense whirlpool of black energy had taken Diana back with it into the terrible current of space. Diana would live—but only as a mote of defeated consciousness whirled along forever into the depths of space by forces too great to fight.

The man on the floor raised his head, sat up, rubbed the great lump left there by the flat of Druga's axe—and his eyes met the flaming attraction of Eos' eyes. With a bound he was at her side, gathering her up into his arms, crooning brokenly.

"How long I sat and watched your grief and envied the other men who came for their brief spell of life in Paradise before the black witchcraft of your enemy made them into stone. How long

I pitied you, poor Eos! How many centuries have passed, and now a miracle! I am alive, and have you once again! No other ever shall take you from me . . ."

Druga picked up the axe that lay disregarded on the floor.

"That may be what you wish, stranger, and though you are no enemy, if it is Eos you desire, you shall have her only over my dead body! Arm yourself, and prepare to die!"

The stranger eyed Druga scornfully. With a sudden gliding motion, he had passed from Eos' arms and seized the sword from the floor, was driving with it for Druga's throat. Druga got the axe in the way of the sword, but an axe, whatever antiquarians may say, was never the best tool against a smart swordsman; and this man knew his way with the weapon.

He drove Druga to the wall with swift darting movements of the blade, and Druga had no time to swing the unwieldy axe, but had to keep parrying the thrusts with the axe-haft, holding it between his hands like a quarterstaff. In moments his life blood would have been spilled on the floor had not Eos cried out:

"Hold, you brawling idiots, I am for neither of you! What do you think I have gone through all this for, to have you two whom I love kill each other? Now put up the weapons before I loose my own natural lightning and send you both into that doom you can only guess at!"

DRUGA peered at Eos, startled, and the reanimated statue pressed the blade to his throat, but Eos struck it up with her hand as he turned to peer at her too, and then Eos opened both her eyes quite wide upon them so that a weakness came upon them both, sending them to their knees in strange

thralldom to the energies within her. So leaving them, Eos walked out of the chamber and to the great hall.

After a time, when their reeling senses returned, the two men followed the footsteps that still sparkled where she had stepped, like flickering motes of golden dust outlining her prints upon the floor—followed the steps like men out of their wits, half staggering.

As they entered the hall, Eos was repeating the procedure so recently gone through by Diana, preparing a great cauldron of the fluid she had used to bring life again to the stone bodies. They leaned weakly against the wall, watching her as she poured the boiling, steaming liquid over one after another of the statues. The first figure so bathed was the body of Feronia.

She came out of the stony trance like a fury, blazing one indignant glance toward Eos, then turned the torrents of her wrath upon Druga.

"You philandering booby! I made you what you are and you repay me by running off from me in my greatest need and taking up with this—this—"

"She released you from your stony prison, Feronia!" Druga said hastily, fearing she would anger Eos with whatever word she thought of to describe her rival—and Feronia was clever enough to avoid saying what she was about to say, but went on with her abuse of Druga.

"Never mind what or who she is, it is you that has shown yourself the ingrate, for she owed me nothing. You couldn't go to Mors, Daughter of the Night, and get this thing properly taken care of at once, knowing she was friendly to me, no! You had to wander off on your old grey horse, never thinking of Mors, and get yourself wrapped up with the first woman that you come to, and wind your affections all around the planet in pursuit of her. You could-

n't even remember me for one little month! You—you—oh, Druga!"

With which outburst her voice broke, and weeping and saying his name over and over Feronia went into his arms and wept there on his breast for a long time. And after her tears were stopped Druga knew that Feronia would never mention the affair again.

Druga held the dear form of his loved one close and let her weep, stroking the raven black hair, within him the soft well of affection for her filling and filling with all the memories of her dear, mad, competent, unpredictable, tyrannical ways. Over the curling sweep of her dear hair he watched Eos reviving one by one the dead loves of her past, and thought to himself that at least with Feronia he did not have all those rivals to contend with. The slight line across his throat where Eos' magic had stopped the sword of one rival from letting out his life reminded him too that with Eos as she was now, there would be no day pass that some of these warriors would not try to get rid of some of the rest. Druga decided that after all, Feronia loved him alone, while with Eos there was no knowing what rivals he would have.

Now Eos got a great snake out of the forest, a female, cunningly marked with little emerald markings, and striped with many colors, most venomous and snake-charming in its appearance.

This snake she quickly separated from its head, and placed upon its cunning female body the head of Dionaea, doing all that was needful successfully to incorporate the two into one life.

Baena's tail, which caused him great pain at the separation, she healed by applying a salve, assuring him that he would in time grow a new tail to take the place of the old, as is the way with snakes the world over.

WHEN Dionaea awoke and found herself with a female snake's body, and Baena mooning over her like a lovesick coil of ship's hawser, she let out strings of oaths such as no ship's hawser had heard since the beginning of time. All of which seemed strikingly snake-charming to Baena, who only kissed Dionaea lovingly with his pointed tongue and assured her she would get used to him or he would devour her and seek a new mate elsewhere. With which assurance Dionaea ceased to curse and began to fawn upon Baena, saying:

"Why, how can you think it is your noble self I object to, Baena? It is just that I did not expect this development! I have grown so used to you that there is really very little difference, after all."

So conversing, the now lowly Dionaea and the now lordly Baena glided from the chamber and made their way down the ruby ladder of strange crystal, and out into the world. For it is only so that a male can leave the pole of the universal life force of the female principle, in the company of a female good enough to keep his mind from obeying the influence of the magnetic field.

Feronia, watching the scene, decided it was time for bed, and mentally taking Druga by the ear, led him out and down the ruby ladder and across the rainbow bridge of fragile glass into her own halls.

"Eos will handle her difficulties much the better without our presence, Druga. Besides we must get to bed, for in the morning there will be much work to attend to . . ."

"What you have in mind?"

"Well, first we have to practice the magical performance we have just watched Eos go through, so that if we ever need it we too can release a figure

from that stony curse of petrification. It is a most uncomfortable state. Then we have to return to Eos' disk palace and from her get certain information, such as the whirlpool she used to suck up the strength of Diana and cast it out into a current of force flowing through hyper-space—for we might need it sometime in the future."

"Which I devoutly pray you will not manage," murmured Druga, yawning. "I am too tired to even think about such a thing tonight."

With which words Druga stretched himself across the bed and straightway began to snore, and Feronia, who had expected a warmer welcome home than *that*, looked at him exasperated beyond measure. But then she insinuated her own witch's perceptions into his mind, looked over the somewhat shriveled memories of her that remained to him, and resolved to recreate his love entire before she strained it again with her impatience.

Outside, the great glowing magnetic field of female attraction pulsed and glowed and reached its strange streamers across the sky. The disk with its ancient, quaint, pillared and beautiful mansion, trembled in the current of the energy flow of the pole of life. In Feronia's hall a dark, small witch bent to her knees and prayed a prayer, with tears streaking her too-determined face, that this great sleeping man of hers would return his heart where it belonged.

CHAPTER IV

NOW a witch's prayer is pretty apt to find its way to the God to which it is directed, especially when it is a white witch with black hair doing the praying, and not a black witch with white hair, as is so often the case.

Mother Mors, watching the small

black-and-white-striped prayer winging its way across the deeps of night, reached out her hand and gathered it in to her whirling bosom, full of the milk of eternal kindness and soft with the vibrant softness of darkness itself, and read it there with the inner eyes of her heart.

That prayer contained some startling and incomplete information, and the mention of the passing of her enemy Diana whom she had tried to entrap herself for so long, brought Mors abruptly out of her sleep and sent her swiftly arrowing down upon the little valley where the golden pole now lit the whole sky.

The mystery and awesome power and majestic primal vitality of her silhouetted against and merged with the golden glory of the primal pole as the vast body of Mors merged and condensed and settled and came into human form there within the great banquet hall of Eos' palace on the disk.

Now as the body of the great Goddess of the night came into solidity before Eos, her laughter rang out, rich and ringing and with low, dark undertones. Eos looked up from the great stack of ancient alchemic formulae where she sought the solution to the incredible quandary of too many lovers. For too-much-of-a-good-thing she could not find any reference in the books, for they were all designed to give only information on how to get rid of too-much-of-a-bad-thing.

Rosy to the tips of her fingers with embarrassment, Eos rose to her feet, her glory dimmed by the majesty of Mors' dark beauty, her height dwarfed by the tall, mysterious strength of Mors' indestructible figure, a figure such as must have caused the ancient artists deepest despair to depict in the least of its intense and vital and overwhelmingly sublime symmetry.

Mors' laughter made Eos blush till rosy was not the word for her.

"My dear Eos, can this be you? I would hardly have expected it of you, who have always been to me the personification of so many virtues . . ."

"Oh, Mother Mors, I am glad to see you, in spite of this state of affairs—you can help me. You must know what has happened?"

"I can guess, but you had better explain from the beginning. Only a woman could know what to do here, it seems." Mors glanced around at the thousand and some virile males.

"You know the Pole is responsible for bringing them here, and one by one Diana turned them into stone as soon as my lonely heart turned to them for affection."

"It's a good story, but no one but me will ever believe it."

Eos only looked pitifully at Mors, and Mors took her to her dark, soft heart, and the vast strength of her poured into the vibrant soul of Eos, mingled there with that golden energy that made her what she was.

"Whatever I do is going to break their hearts—you know what this place does to men. I cannot love them all, but I *do*, and I cannot send them away empty-handed. You know what it *means* to them! It is really all that cruel Diana's fault!

"For ridding me of her I owe you a debt, and though you are but a child to my ages of life, I will help you avoid ruining the lives of all these fine men whom you have loved. Suppose I take them away with me, all but one, and give them back their own time and place before they found their way here—give them the will to want that life before they knew you, would that comfort you?"

"Only one?" murmured Eos, then blushed as she looked out over the

thousand-and-odd faces that stared at her accusingly.

"Only one, and you must choose him carefully from among them all."

"That will take some thought," said Eos, her face full of indecision. "I loved each of them dearly."

MORS' face grew a little stern at that, and quickly Eos went on:

"I'll attend to it directly, Mother Mors."

"I have a little errand to attend to over at Feronia's, I will be back in a few beats of Druga's stricken heart. You could at least have kept your body hidden from him, out of respect for Feronia! I have not much patience with your dilemma. After all, there are other places to live, you know."

"But not for me, Mors. It follows me about!"

Mors' face grew even sterner, and Eos added:

"Of course I *know* that is because of the peculiar nature of the metal of which the disk is constructed, but *after all you know* it has been my home for so *very* long, I couldn't be expected to give up my home, could I?"

Mors only lifted one great dark eyebrow and lifted suddenly into dark whirling force and disappeared.

Eos, her face tear-streaked, went slowly down the endless line of men, examining each one carefully and cudgeling her memory to decide which one she had loved the *very* most. It was so difficult.

Mors, meanwhile, drifted into being over the sleeping Druga and the praying Feronia, still on her knees, her face upraised and very sweet with the dark-winged eyes closed, the long line of her throat sheer beauty in the dim light.

She touched the closed eyes softly with her potent fingertips, and Feronia opened them with a new understanding

gifted into their structure. Then she softly entered Feronia's body and together they peered down into the body and the thought of the sleeping man, and with her dark fingertips vibrant with the energies of dark space, Mors went over each little nerve and passage in the brain where the energies of the disk and the Pole and the sight of the intense glory of Eros' body had burned out Feronia's years of love.

Everywhere she touched, a new awareness grew, centered and vitalized by the presence of Mors within the body of Feronia, so that nowhere was there any evidence of the loss of love, but only the beautiful memories of Feronia alive again within his mind, and wherever desire lived in him Mors touched her fingers, and planted a seed that would grow with good treatment into vital love. As she worked, Feronia wept shamelessly with thankfulness, and for every tiny node of love that Mors planted in Druga, one sprouted likewise in Feronia, and some of them were for Druga and some were natural gratitude to Mors for this work of replacement. The sleeping Druga stirred and his arms came about Feronia's hips where she stood by the bed. Mors sent her strange energies through the two lovers, marrying them there with the potent blessing that is actual magnetic mingling of being—and Feronia knew that only by abuse could she lose this man again!

"You are a good girl, Feronia, and you have a good man. I will visit you again, if that *Dark Master* wills it."

A chill went through the chamber at the mention of The Name, and Mors went out with the strange ecstatic sweep of entity, and Feronia knew what was meant by *God-head*.

EOS waited for a long time before Mors came again to her, for the

God-head required certain things of Mors for this night's work.

As she at last reappeared to Eos, Eos did not note the terrific emotions of love-ecstasy upon her face, the record of her touching with *the One* upon the mention of him, and began to complain.

"How can I give them up, Mors?"

But Mors only looked at her with absent, flaming eyes, intent upon some far thing, and for the first time Eos noted the vast and subtle change in her, as if she had touched some vast fountain of beneficence somewhere in the while she had been gone. Her cheeks were flushed, her breast rising and falling. Mors was like a woman in love, or a Goddess touched by the love of Jove, and Eos' eyes fell before her sublimely, and only stood waiting for Mors to do what she must.

So Mors absently gathered up all the thousand-and-some men, tucking them into her bosom one by one, and whirled into the night with all but one.

As the Goddess Mors disappeared, a sudden suspicion struck Eos, and she whirled to look upon the man that was left behind.

She burst into tears.

The Red Dwarf reached out and patted her golden head. Then he stepped to the controls and sent the disk winging swiftly away.

"Where are you going?" asked Eos, lifting her head in surprise, and looking indignantly through her tears.

"To the opposite Pole of Energy, my sweet one," said the Red Dwarf. "Be patient a little while, and you will yet be supremely happy. Mother Mors is very wise . . ."

And Eos was very happy. You see, I do know, for I was there. If it were not so, how could you be sure what I tell you is true? For it is true . . .

The wise will understand what I have written.

★ SHOOTING STARS ★

By H. R. STANTON

DID you ever hear the saying that if you wish on a shooting star, your wish will come true? That is no more true than the man in the moon. In the first place they aren't stars and they aren't rare. Several million of them fall into our earth's atmosphere every twenty-four hours. They aren't really stars, but instead, they are for the most part wee bits of matter no bigger than a grain of sand, although some weigh several tons. These "shooting stars" have been called cosmic rubbish. Perhaps they are bits of material that were left over when our planets were formed. If the planets were formed from matter pulled out of the sun, then undoubtedly this material was pulled from the sun at the same time. These bits of material are not visible till they enter the earth's atmosphere where the friction causes them to grow so hot that they melt and vaporize. This burning vapor trail is what we see and call a shooting star, but astronomers call them meteors.

Sometimes such a large meteor enters our atmosphere that it is not able to burn itself out and

a piece of it falls on the earth. This piece is called a meteorite. Meteorites are the only tangible connection with matter beyond our atmosphere. Scientists can subject meteorites to chemical analysis and they have found that they fall into three types. One kind is a stony material composed of crystalline rock. Then there is the iron meteorite. The iron in it differs from that found on earth in that it has a crystalline structure. The third kind is called the iron-stony meteorite and it is made of iron and stone. Sometimes one single meteorite will fall, but usually many hit the earth at once. In 1869, 100,000 fragments fell at Pultusk. Most of them were very small. So far the largest known meteorite was found by Perry in Greenland. It weighed thirty-six and a half tons. There is a great crater in the Arizona desert that is 4,000 feet in diameter and 150 feet deep. Astronomers believe it was created by a huge meteorite over a thousand years ago, because they have found pieces of meteoric iron in the walls of the crater.

★ ★ ★

★ THE WELL-READ GHOST ★

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

NOT all ghosts are trouble makers. Some have been known to be very quiet and charming to have around. For example, there is the ghost of Doctor Harris as seen by Nathaniel Hawthorne. At that time, Hawthorne was living in Boston and spent many hours in the reading room of the public library. This room was also frequented by the elderly, retired businessmen of the town, and the old lawyers, doctors, clergymen, etc. Among them would be old Doctor Harris who would sit in the chair nearest the fire and read the Boston Post. He seemed to be a permanent fixture in the reading room of the old library. On this particular day, Hawthorne visited the library as usual and noted the old gentleman seated in his favorite chair dozing over his paper. Nothing in his appearance seemed any different from the usual. Later in the day Hawthorne was told that the old doctor had died the previous day. He couldn't believe it till he saw the body of the old man, and he was disturbed to think that his imagination could have played such a trick on him. The next day as Hawthorne went up the steps of the library, his thoughts were that he would never see old Doctor Harris again. When he opened the door of the reading room he glanced toward the chair where the doctor usually sat, and there was the figure of the deceased man, reading his Boston

Post as usual. Hawthorne was reluctant to mention this fact to anyone, for the others did not seem to see him sitting there. So he sat down with his own paper, and from time to time glanced over toward the old doctor who should have been lying in his coffin with the rest of his body, waiting for burial. But he had evidently formed such a strong habit of reading the paper that he came back from the other world just to keep up with the news. This apparition appeared to Hawthorne for several months. The old doctor sometimes had his spectacles shoved up on his forehead and seemed to be gazing across his paper at him. Hawthorne never made an attempt to speak to him because the others would think him out of his mind to address an empty chair, and besides he was afraid the doctor might burden him with some disagreeable task. He never saw the ghost enter or leave the room. He would just sit there and look as real as anyone. One day the old man looked over at Hawthorne with such a sad, wistful, appealing expression that he could hardly withstand it. So Hawthorne thought it was time for him to go, but he could never forget the disappointed, helpless look on the old man's face as he closed the door of the reading room with the resolve never to return again.

★ ★ ★



The PLOTTERS

by ALEXANDER BLADE

He came from a far planet to find some of the Earth's secrets. But Marko found other things, too—like his love for beautiful Beth



I pulled the trigger and a sizzling bolt of energy leaped forth

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IT SEEMED to be the same tree that kept getting in my way. I tried to go around it but it moved with me and I ran right into it. I found myself sprawled on my back and my nose was bleeding where I had hit it against the tree. Then I got up and ran again.

I had to keep running. I didn't know why; I just had to. There was a puddle of water and I splashed through it and then slipped and fell into a thorny bush. When I got up there were scratches on my hands and face and chest.

As yet I felt no pain. That couldn't come for a while, after I had done a lot more running. But at the moment I couldn't feel a thing.

In my conscious mind there was only a sort of grayness. I didn't know where I was, or who I was, or why I was running. I didn't know that if I ran long enough and bumped into enough trees and scratched myself often enough I would eventually feel pain. Or that out of the exertion and the pain would come awareness.



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All that must have been there, but buried so deep it didn't come through. It was only instinct which kept me going.

The same tree was in my way again and this time I didn't even try to go around it. My breath was knocked out of me. After a few gasps it came back, and then I was off again.

I went up a rise and down into a hollow and tripped over roots. That time I didn't fall. I went up the other side of the hollow with the wind whistling in my ears. A few drops of rain fell. There were flashes of lightning in the sky.

Wet leaves whipped against my face and there was a crack of thunder so close that it shook me. I ran away from the thunder and up another rise and down into another hollow.

The wind was stronger now. It came in long blasts. Sometimes I ran with it and sometimes against it. When I ran against it I didn't make much headway, but my legs kept pumping. There was tall grass to slow me down and there were roots to trip me. There was the wind and the thunder and the lightning. And there were always trees.

And then there was a terrible flash and above me a crack that was not of thunder. Something came crashing down. It was the limb of a tree. It crashed against my chest and smashed me flat on my back and pinned me there.

One of my ribs felt broken. It jabbed into me as I fought to raise this weight from my chest, and this was a pain I could feel.

This was something that hurt as nothing had ever hurt me before. This was excruciating. But it was the pain that cut through the grayness of my mind, and because of that I welcomed it.

With the pain would come knowl-

edge. I would know who I was and why I was running. Already there were figures racing across the blankness. There were faces and there were names: Ristal, Kresh, Marko, Copperd, Beth.

I was Marko. I knew that much already. Beth was the golden girl. Somehow I knew that too. But who were the others?

It wasn't coming fast enough. I couldn't find the connections. There was only one way to bring it back, to bridge the gaps. I had to start somewhere, with what I knew. I had to start with myself and then bridge the gap to Beth. That was the beginning.

I CHECKED with the mirror for the last time and decided that I would pass muster. As far as I could see, I looked like almost any college student.

There wasn't anything I could do about my hair. It hadn't grown at all. It was a mass of short, black ringlets that fit my head like a tight cap. But there was no use worrying about that.

Mrs. Mara came down the hall just as I was locking the door. She looked hurt when she saw me turn the key.

"You don't have to do that in my house," she said. "There's nobody would think of going into your room."

"Of course not," I said. "It's just force of habit, you know."

I smiled and hoped she would pass it off as lightly as I seemed to. The last thing in the world I wanted was to have her get suspicious and go prowling about my room. I felt easier when she smiled back at me.

"Sure. And where are you off to, now?"

"Swimming," I said. "That is, if I can get into the college pool."

"Just act like you own the place and nobody will ask you any questions," she said, and winked at me.

That was exactly the way I had figured it, but it was good to have reassurance. Theoretically, no one was supposed to use the pool who was not a member of the faculty or student body. Enforcement, however, was lax, and the chances were that nobody would ask to see my card.

Mrs. Mara and I were right. The day was hot, and the men who were supposed to be watching the entrance were sitting in the shade of the stands and quenching their thirst with soft drinks. I walked right in, looking straight ahead.

It was a large pool, used for skating in winter, and there were stands built on three sides. Instead of going down to the locker rooms, I merely slipped out of my shirt and trousers, rolled them into a ball and dropped them beside the pool. A good many others had also worn their swim suits underneath.

Then I looked around for the girl.

SHE WAS down near the other end of the pool, talking to some people. As I came toward them she left the group and climbed up on the diving board.

Against her white bathing suit, her small trim figure showed golden. Her hair was almost the same color. She looked like the bathing suit models I had seen in store windows. The golden model came to life as she left the board in a high, arching dive. She hit the water with hardly a splash.

"Nice stuff, Beth," one of the men said as she swam toward them.

"Was it really, Ken?" the girl asked.

He nodded as he said it was. They began to talk about diving and swimming. The man called Ken did most of the talking. He said he wanted to show her a few things about her swimming stroke.

He jumped off the edge of the pool and swam across and then turned

around and swam back. Everybody stopped what they were doing and watched him. When he clambered out he smiled in a very superior way.

"See what I mean? You've got to use your legs more."

"You splash too much," I said.

It was the only way I could think of at the moment to get into the conversation. But it got me in. Everybody was looking at me as though I were out of my mind. Ken sneered.

"Oh, I do?"

"Don't take it offensively," I said.

"But you really do. Also your arm motion is not good."

HE WAS so angry that it was almost funny. Now I was sorry I had spoken, because the girl might be a close friend of his and she might take offense.

"Maybe you would like to show me how it's done," Ken said hotly. "I could make it worth your while. Suppose we race two lengths. For ten dollars."

"That's not fair, Ken," the girl said.

I could see that she didn't like the way he was taking it, so that was all right. But I hesitated. I didn't have ten dollars. On the other hand, I had been watching these people swim.

It was an easy way to make ten dollars, since I had no other means of getting money. There was the hundred dollars which I had taken from a man on the road the day I came into town, but that money was gone.

"Come on," I said, and started walking to the end of the pool.

When I got there I bent and dipped one foot into the water. It was colder than the water I had been used to, and not quite as heavy, somehow. I pulled my foot out quickly and everybody laughed, except the girl.

"This isn't right," she said. She

turned to me. "You don't know who Ken is, apparently."

"You are very kind," I said. I smiled at her and she smiled back. She had blue eyes.

By that time the pool had been cleared. Everybody was out of the water and standing at the edge. Ken said, "Whenever you're ready."

"I am ready now," I said. And immediately one of his friends gave the signal, "Go!"

Ken jumped in first. Then I dived in. Once in the water it did not feel so cold nor so light. I swam down to the other end and turned around and swam back. When I climbed out, Ken was just making his turn at the far end. Everyone was looking at me very strangely. Ken came out rubbing his shoulder.

"Must have pulled a muscle," he muttered.

"In that case I wouldn't think of taking your money," I told him.

"I don't believe I've seen you around before," he said. "You've got to have a card to swim here, you know."

"Well, I don't have one. So I suppose I had better go."

"Of all the cheap tricks," the girl said. "I think I'll go too. Wait for me."

I waited for her while she went to get dressed. I put on my trousers over my swimming trunks, put on my shirt and shoes and sat on a bench and waited. When she came out we started for the exit. Ken came hurrying toward us.

"I thought I was taking you home," he said, his face red with anger.

She didn't bother to reply and he put his hand on her arm. I told him to let go and he let go. Then he swung around and hit me on the jaw with all his might. I grabbed his arm with one hand and his throat with the other and threw him into the middle of the pool.

THINGS were going better than I expected. As we walked along, she seemed quite interested in me. I told her my name and she told me that she was Beth Copperd, the daughter of a professor at the university. I pretended that I had not known those things.

When we got to her home, which was on a tree lined street, we paused for a moment. Across the street there was a car with a man sitting in it, pretending to read a newspaper.

I knew all about that man. I knew there was another man who was watching the back of the house. If not for that I would not have had to go through this lengthy affair with Beth Copperd.

"I regret very much this trouble with your friend," I said.

"You needn't. He's had it coming for a long time." She stared at me thoughtfully. "You know, Marko, I'm a little afraid of you."

"Of me? But why?"

"Well," she hesitated, "it's hard to say. But when a man jumps into a pool and swims so much faster than one of our country's best swimmers, and then picks up that swimmer and throws him fifty feet without the slightest effort . . . well, that man is slightly unusual, to say the least."

"Oh, the swimming . . ."

I hadn't thought that what was quite ordinary for me might seem exactly the opposite to these people. I had blundered. So I tried to shrug it off, as though such things were common among my people. Which they were. But that line only dragged me deeper. This girl was no fool.

"That's what I meant, Marko. You aren't being modest. You're acting as though you're used to such feats, and take them as a matter of course. And there's your accent. I can't quite place it."

"Some day I'll tell you all about it,"

I said lightly. "When we know each other better."

"That's going pretty fast, isn't it?"

"Some of us have found that we don't have all the time we should like. We must go fast, or not at all."

It was a platitude, slightly jumbled, but none the less true. Beth was looking up at me. There were things she might have noticed; that my skin was uncommonly smooth, and that I hadn't even the faintest trace of whiskers.

She didn't notice those things. She was looking into my eyes. I found myself enjoying this experience.

"Will you come in for a while?" she asked slowly.

I relaxed. Everything was all right, for the present. She was taking me at face value. She liked me and I liked her. The operation was proceeding smoothly.

We walked into a large room, pleasantly furnished. On a couch opposite the doorway three men sat talking. Two others stood before them. The moment we entered, the conversation stopped abruptly.

"Beth?" said a tall, graying man. He was already stuffing papers into a bag. "Back so soon?"

He wasn't really listening for a reply and Beth didn't make one. When he had the papers in the bag he locked it, then snapped it around his wrist and put the key in his pocket.

"We'll continue this at the lab," he said to the men. "I'll be along in just a few minutes." Then he came up to us.

"I see you've replaced your blond young man," he smiled.

I knew all about this man who stood before me, with his stooped shoulders and keen eyes. Eldeth Copperd would have been surprised at the extent of my knowledge. I even knew why his government considered it wise to have sev-

eral of its security agents near him at all times.

"Can't you stay a minute and get acquainted with Marko?" Beth was saying. "He's really a remarkable fellow. He can swim faster than you or I could run."

"Literally? That would be quite fast."

"Literally."

He looked at me with sudden interest and I was sorry the conversation had taken that turn. I didn't want those keen eyes examining me too closely. They might note the absence of skin porosity.

Copperd didn't notice, but I made a mental note to watch my step. And another not to go swimming again. Beth would be watching me, and if she were close enough she might see the webbing pop out between my fingers and toes when I got into the water.

"That's my father," Beth said after he and I had shaken hands and he had left. "Demands exactness. He's a scientist, you know. A physicist."

"Oh?" I said. As if I hadn't known. "Is he always this busy?"

"Busier. If he isn't working at the lab till all hours, he's working at home in his study. Or having conferences. The only time I have him alone and to myself is Sunday evening."

That was the information I had been hoping for.

BETH and I sat on the couch her father had vacated. We talked. I watched my words carefully; there were a good many commonplace things I knew nothing about. And I didn't want any more questions about myself. Fortunately, conversation between a young man and a young woman is much the same everywhere. I didn't have to pretend I was interested in Beth. She was unusually attractive. And she

seemed to find me so.

We talked a bit, laughed a good deal, and when I got up to leave I knew that I had done well in the initial stage. But there was still a good deal to be done.

"May I see you tonight?" I asked. "Just a 'coke date'."

That was an expression I'd heard and had taken the trouble to make certain I understood. It seemed to be just the thing in the present case.

"I'd like that," Beth said. "Pick me up about nine."

Her choice of time could not have been more suitable. I was out of money. There was Mrs. Mara to be paid, and now the cost of the evening's entertainment.

Until darkness fell I could do nothing about that. So I went back to my room and read old newspapers I had collected. I had discovered on my first day that those were the best sources of information. Those and the moving pictures.

For one who must learn a great deal about a people in a short time there is one infallible way: watch them in their favorite sports and relaxations. The moving pictures and the comic strips had been invaluable. In another few weeks I could have passed anywhere.

At eight o'clock it was growing dark. I changed my shirt, put on a sport coat and left the room. Five minutes later I was walking down a quiet street that was lined with fashionable homes.

After that it was merely a question of time. I went around the block, found that it was still too light, and went around again, this time slowly.

There was only one man on the street on my next time around. I sized him up quickly and decided that he was prosperous. He came on toward me. I managed to be looking the other way.

We bumped into each other and he fell. I said, "Sorry" and bent to help

him up. My fingers touched his throat in the proper places and he went limp.

Within a matter of seconds I had his wallet out of his pocket and extracted several bills. When his eyes flickered again I was just raising him to his feet.

"All my fault," I said contritely. "Are you all right?"

"Seem to be." He was gruff, but that was all. He didn't know that for a matter of seconds he had been unconscious.

At nine o'clock I came up the walk to the Copperd home. This time the security agent was leaning against a tree, lighting a cigarette. I made certain that he saw my face clearly.

One upstairs window showed a light, and the faint murmur of voices drifted down. That had to be Copperd's room. Then a porch light flashed on and Beth came out of the door. She was wearing a white dress and the overhead light seemed to create a golden halo above her head.

I momentarily forgot about her father.

HOW much can a man learn in a few weeks? I had to be so very careful. Historical matters had to be avoided at all costs. Contemporary affairs were fine. Philosophy was best.

Philosophy is always the best. Good and evil are present everywhere. They can be discussed in the vaguest terms. We discussed many things in vague terms.

And yet there was a sense of intimacy which grew between us. It was hard for me to define, and after a while I gave up trying to discover what it was. I merely enjoyed it.

When I took her home I knew that it was not fear of the dark that made her walk so close to me. The movies had taught me a great deal about this matter of love play. Although some of

it was highly exaggerated, it showed clearly enough the drives of these people, and some of their methods of acting them out.

We were standing on the porch when I kissed Beth. It was the first time I had ever pressed my lips to those of anyone else. My technique was good. I felt Beth respond, pressing harder against me.

My mission was on its way to completion. I felt a moment of triumph. And then suddenly, crazily, my mission was gone from my mind. I felt only a strange exhilaration that swept over me and made my heart pound and my head grow hot.

"What's the matter, Marko?" Beth asked as I pulled away.

I didn't know what was wrong. I didn't try to figure it out. I had to get out of there and try to regain my equilibrium. On a mission like mine I had to keep my head.

"Shall I see you tomorrow?" I said.

"All the tomorrow's you want," Beth answered.

There was eagerness, and yet a note of regret. It was as though she instinctively knew that something was wrong. But my work had been well done; she was in too far, and I had cut her emotional line of retreat.

I saw Beth the next afternoon, and the next evening. My presence on the porch and in her home became such a common thing that the security agent hardly gave me a glance now.

Those few days passed by swiftly, and yet each hour in those days was long. I was very cautious; Beth and I kissed many times but I never allowed myself to be moved as on that first time.

Sunday loomed larger and larger, closer and closer. I was a constant and ever present guest. It was an elementary matter to get Beth to invite me for

Sunday dinner. The invitation came on Saturday night, and that night when I came back to my room I called Ristal for the first time since we had arrived.

"Tomorrow," I said into the *besnal*. "Early evening."

"Good."

That was all we said, but it was enough. Our frequency was too high to be picked up. Still, we were taking no chances. Ristal knew precisely what I meant and he would be ready.

I had the feeling that comes when a mission is about to be completed. There was a feeling of tension, and yet for the first time in my career I had a lowering of spirits that I could not explain.

The feeling persisted until late Sunday afternoon. Then I pushed it from my mind. I dressed carefully, slipped the *besnal* into my inner pocket, and put my *del* gun in my coat pocket.

"Take your coat off," Beth said when I came in. "You ought to know there's no formality here."

"I'm really quite comfortable," I told her. "Am I late?"

"No. Just on time. Dad will be down in a moment."

He came down the stairs from his study while we were talking. He greeted me warmly, and yet I felt that this time he was scrutinizing me. All during the dinner his eyes were on me, weighing me. I felt what was coming, and as we rose from the table it came.

"I hope you won't be offended, Marko," Copperd said. "But there are some strange things about you. Do you ever shave?"

"No," I said. I looked out the window and saw it was growing darker.

"That's odd. And about your hair . . . have you ever realized that every strand of it grows in a different direction? You could never comb it. Your skin is of an unusually fine texture. And when you reached for something

at the table I observed strange folds of skin between your fingers. You are somehow not like the rest of us."

"Naturally," I said. It didn't matter now. It was dark enough.

"Why naturally?"

"Because," I told him, "I am a Venusian."

MY TONE was matter of fact. Yet they knew that I was not joking. Beth was staring at me, a growing fear and horror in her eyes. Her father seemed dazed by the revelation. I took the *del* gun from my pocket and showed it to them.

"This is a weapon strange to you. But it is effective at this range. Please don't make me use it."

"But what do you want?" Copperd asked.

"I want you to take a ride with me. In your car."

I let them put on their coats and then we walked out onto the porch and down the stairs. Across the street the security agent barely glanced at us. Then we got into Copperd's car, Beth and he in the front seat and I in the back. I told him in which direction to go.

At the outskirts of town we lost the car that was following us. I had planned this part of it perfectly. We pulled into a side road and turned off our lights. The agent went right past us.

"What is it you want of me?" Copperd said as we started up again.

"We want to have a long discussion with you about some matters on which you are an authority."

"And that's what this whole affair with me was for? So that you could get to my father!" Beth said accusingly. I saw her shoulders shake.

"Yes. Now turn off here."

We turned off the main road and followed a rutted trail onto an old farm.

The farmhouse was a wreck, but the barn still good. Our ship was in there.

The door opened as we walked toward the barn. Ristal's tall figure was framed in the doorway, and behind him stood Kresh, broad and ungainly. The others crowded up behind them.

"Good work, Marko," Ristal said. We went into the ship, which filled the whole interior of the barn.

"This is Commander Ristal, of the Venusian Intelligence," I told Copperd and Beth.

"What's *your* official title?" Beth asked bitterly.

"I am a special agent and language expert," I told her. Then I explained why I had brought them here.

"Our civilization is in some way far in advance of yours. As you see, we have mastered interplanetary travel. But it is essentially a peaceful civilization. Our weapons, such as we have, are of limited range and power.

"When it became known that Earth was developing monstrous weapons of aggression we realized that we must be prepared for the worst. There was only one way to discover what you already had and what you were working on. Once we arrived here we found that a man named Copperd was the prime figure in his country's atomic weapons research. It became our duty to seek him out."

"I see," Copperd grunted. "And now you expect me to reveal secrets which I am bound by oath to protect with my very life?"

"You will reveal them," Ristal told him.

I didn't like the way Ristal said that. There was a tinge of cruelty in his tone and in the sudden tightening of his lips. I hadn't ever worked with him before, or with Kresh, who was Ristal's second in command, but I didn't like the methods their manner implied. Copperd

looked worried.

"I told you we were a peaceful people," I put in.

"Let me handle this," Ristal said. He pointed to a machine which stood in a corner.

"That," he explained to Copperd, "is a device which we ordinarily use in surgery and diagnosis. It has the faculty of making the nerves infinitely more sensitive to stimuli. Also to pain. Do you understand?"

"You can't use that on him!" I said. Ristal looked at me strangely.

"Of course not. But on his daughter, yes. No father likes to see his daughter suffer."

"That's out," I said flatly. "You know what our orders are."

"I know what they were. This is my own idea, Marko. Please remember that I am commander here."

I was duty bound to obey him, and I thought that I *was* going to obey. But as Kresh stepped toward Beth I found myself between them.

"I think that those higher up may have something to say about this," I told Ristal.

"With the information this man can give me I shall be in a position to ignore those higher up," Ristal grinned.

Kresh reached for Beth and I hit him. I knew now what Ristal had in mind. With atomic weapons he could make himself master of Venus, and of Earth. But even more important than that was the thought that he must not harm Beth.

KRESH was coming back at me. I hit him again and he went down. Then the others came piling in. There were four of them, too many for me. I fought like a madman but they overwhelmed me and held me helpless.

"Give him a shot of *bental*," Ristal ordered. "That ought to quiet him.

Then dump him in a cabin. We'll dispose of him later."

Then Kresh was coming at me with the hypodermic needle. I felt it stab into my arm. He gave me a dose that might have killed an ordinary man.

I knew how *bental* worked. It was a drug that would throw me into a stupor, that would render my mind blank. Already it was taking effect. I pretended to be unconscious. Two men lifted me and carried me to a cabin, dropped me on the bunk and went out. The last thing I saw from beneath my lids was Beth being dragged toward that diabolical machine.

My senses were leaving me. I knew that I had to overcome the effects of the drug. I knew that I had to get out of that cabin. Somehow I dragged myself out of the bunk and got a porthole open. I crawled through it and dropped to the floor of the barn.

There were some loose boards and I pried them further apart and crawled out into the open. I no longer knew what I was doing; I no longer remembered Beth. I only knew that I had to run and keep on running.

MY BROKEN rib was stabbing into me like a knife. Across my chest the limb of the tree was a dead weight that crushed me. But now I knew who I was and what I was doing.

Despite the agony I managed to get my hands under the limb. I pushed up and felt it move. The pressure on my chest was gone. Inch by inch I slid out from beneath the huge branch. I staggered to my feet.

How much time had elapsed I didn't know. I was running again, but now I was running toward the dark barn. It wouldn't have taken Ristal long to get started. Maybe by now Beth was . . . I shut the thought from my mind.

I was a few hundred yards away

when the first scream came. Through the wind and the pelting rain it came, and it chilled me more than they had done.

My chest was aflame with every panting breath I took. But I ran as I had never run before. I had to get there before she screamed again. I had to stop them from doing this to her.

The barn door was locked. I got my fingers under the edge and ripped the wood away from the lock and went on through and into the ship.

None of them saw me coming. Copperd was tied in a chair, his face contorted and tears streaming down his face. Three of the men held Beth while Ristal and Kresh worked over her. The rest were watching.

They hadn't taken my *del* gun from me. But I couldn't use it for fear of hitting Beth. I had it out of my pocket and in my hand as I charged across the room.

MY RUSH brought me into point-blank range on a line parallel with Beth's prostrate figure. At the same time her torturers wheeled about to face me, trapped for an instant in the paralysis of complete surprise. Ristal was the first to recover.

"Drop the gun, Marko," he said.

In my weakened condition, habit governed my reflexes. I almost obeyed the order. Then Ristal took a single step forward and I swung the muzzle of the gun upward again.

"You almost had me," I said. "But you are no longer in command. You and Kresh will return as prisoners, to face trial."

I hoped that he would accept the inevitable. Our crew could plead that they had done nothing except follow the orders of their commanding officer. But for Kresh and Ristal there could be no mitigating circumstances.

They would stand trial and they would receive the harshest of punishments, exile. It was a bleak outlook for them, and the bleakness was reflected in their faces. Ristal's hand flicked to his gun.

I fired once and there was the smell of searing flesh.

"Kresh?" I asked. He looked down at the faceless figure on the floor and shook his head.

He raised his elbows, leaving his holster exposed. I nodded to one of the crewmen and he stepped forward and removed Kresh's *del* gun.

"Drop it on the floor," I said. "Then tear off his insignia and lock him in the forward cabin."

It was the end of the mutiny. But I felt no joy at that. My chest pained intolerably, my shoulders sagged in exhaustion. And I had failed in my mission.

Beth was all right. I went to her and tore the electrodes from her wrists and ankles and helped her to her feet. She refused to look at me, even allowing me to untie her father by myself.

"I regret that it turned out this way," I said.

"How could it turn out any other way?" Beth demanded suddenly. "Do you think we'd trust you now?"

Off in the night a siren wailed. I listened while another siren joined the first.

"They're already looking for you," I said. "Which shows how little chance I would have had of getting to you openly. You'd better be going now."

But as I led them to the door I knew I had to make one more attempt.

"Professor Copperd, do you think there might still be hope? We of Venus can offer much to Earth."

"Maybe there *is* hope," he said, and he looked brighter than I had ever seen him look. "I was reaching the

point where I had no faith in the future. But now, knowing that you have solved the problems which we face . . . Perhaps, if the proper arrangements were made . . . But you would be risking a great deal to return. And I can assure you that for a long time Venus will be safe. So you have no reason—"

"I have a good reason for coming back," I interrupted. Taking Beth by the shoulders, I swung her about to face me.

"I love you," I said. "I started out to trick you and ended by loving you."

Then her arms were about me and her lips were on mine. I felt my face

wet with her tears, and I knew that my love was returned. There were still problems to face, dangers to overcome, but they didn't matter.

"It may be a year," I said. "Perhaps two years."

"I'll be waiting. I'll be standing here, waiting for you."

Now the sirens were very close and there were searchlights sweeping the fields and the woods. I watched Beth and her father walking away and then I closed the door. I should have felt sad, but I didn't. A year or two weren't much. On this planet far from my own, I was leaving my heart, and I would return one day to redeem it.

THE END



MISSING MISSILES



By FRANCES YERXA

WHITE SANDS, New Mexico, is the scene today of what amounts to some of the world's greatest research. It is the Army guided missiles testing station and it was selected because of its remoteness from civilization. It is also well known because of the fact that it is here that the government shoots off the V-2's captured from the Germans with the help of German technicians.

We can only conjecture as to what new missiles are being developed at this remote ordnance station, but we are given plenty of information about the "V-2 shoots" as they are called.

While White Sands is remote from human habitations, it must be remembered that the boys are shooting off gadgets which have a surprisingly long range and which have apparently a perverse delight in going the way they are not supposed to.

Recently a V-2 was shot off. Something went wrong with its guiding mechanism, its gyroscope, or its graphite vanes. The result was that it took off, teetered a bit, wobbling ludicrously on its flaming jets, tipped over and went skimming off toward the Mexican border at a couple of thousand miles per hour. Fortunately it landed and blew up in a completely isolated area. But there were some repercussions. The Mexican government wanted further explanations and got them. Obviously it understood the difficulty connected with rocket shots. It is not an easy matter to direct accurately such large relatively primitive rockets, as the Germans first found out in their bombardment of London. Many of their rockets

failed to operate properly and several caused severe casualties to their own side in the early stages.

Probably the world's ideal rocket range will be the one that is being constructed in Australia. This is in the heart of uninhabited wasteland and desert. It measures thousands of miles instead of hundreds. There should be no danger of missiles striking anything.

One of the permanent features of any rocket range is an observation bunker of solid steel and concrete, the walls of which may be ten or twelve feet thick. This is located very near the rocket launching site and should a missile make a direct hit on such a structure, the scientists and technicians who are observing the operation will be perfectly safe although shaken up a bit.

A rocket range requires facilities for the recovery of launched missiles. At White Sands special observers are stationed in numerous places and their duty is to note where the missile lands, and recover it or parts of it as rapidly as possible. This is not always easy because there isn't much left of a cylinder which has sped over the Earth at a thousand miles an hour or more! However, the fragments provide valuable information and these are returned to the testing station speedily by these special men or by the natives of the region who are now quite familiar with rocket procedure. It is common for them to cock one ear, listen to the roar, and then wisely nod, "There goes another one!"

* * *

"**T**HERE you are!" Judson Taylor, the eccentric physics prof, pulled a metallic object out of his pocket and laid it on the table between us. The object was a solid chunk of some kind of metal, judging from its bright silver color, about the size and shape of a pocket knife.

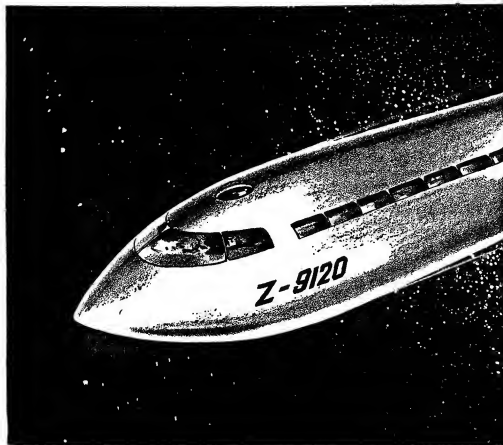
I looked at it stupidly and said, "Where are we?"

I am Bill Halley. Some of the adolescent undergraduate brats at this one-horse college have nicknamed me "Comet" and it burns me up every time some pimply-faced baby waves his arm at me and says, "Hiya, Comet." But I smile and don't let them know

I don't like it, because if they knew there would be no living with them. Jud is head of the physics department and I am one of the three profs under him. When I first came here last fall he looked at my papers, said "BILL HALLEY?" and since then has treated me with the respect he reserves only for the gods of Physics. Probably assumed I was a direct descendant of the Halley who got his name plastered all over Halley's Comet.

Anyway, between classes this morning he had excitedly asked me to meet him at the Campus Lunch during the noon hour and he would show me his latest discovery—and here we were,

The blob of metal clung to the space ship's trail like a pursuing nemesis.



TILLIE

by CRAIG
BROWNING



She was just a blob of metal, but she had emotions like any woman. She, too, wanted ROMANCE, and wasn't coy about running after her "guy"

wherever that was. I picked up the hunk of metal and turned it over in the palm of my hand, sipping my coffee from a cup held in my other hand, and tried to figure out why he was so excited.

There was a peculiar warmth to the stuff. Maybe it was radioactive. But no, it was too light to be one of the heavy elements. I tossed it back to the table top and then nearly rose to the ceiling. The stuff hadn't bounced with a metallic sound at all, but had settled slowly, coming to rest with no sign of a bump.

I picked it up again and looked at Jud, puzzled.

He grinned and said, "Watch this." Then he looked at the lump of metal in a peculiar manner like he might be trying mental telepathy out on it, and suddenly the stuff weighed a ton. It forced my hand down so fast that it bruised as it struck the table. As suddenly the stuff became light again and Judson Taylor had hold of my hand, rubbing it.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Bill. I am not too good at controlling it yet."

"What the hell IS that stuff?" I ground out.

"I don't know, exactly," he replied. "Mallory, the biochemist, made it and brought it to me. He said he got a lot of chemicals spilled. One of them was a rare enzyme that he didn't want to lose, so he mopped up the mess and put it in a large flask and added some alcohol, getting ready to recover this valuable enzyme. Suddenly this stuff started to form on the sides of the flask, just like silver in the mirror coating process. But all the chemicals were pure hydro-carbons with no silver or other metal present. According to Mallory this stuff is some unknown hydro-carbon. I've been playing with it for two days now."

Judson Taylor put the stuff back in his pocket and rose.

"Let's go over to my lab. I want to show you some things I've found out about it."

I gulped down the rest of my coffee and followed him. We crossed the campus of good old Puget U to the antique building which housed the physics department. We climbed the creaking stairs to the third floor which was devoted mostly to Jud's own private research and was filled with apparatus that he had accumulated during the thirty years he had been kingpin of this department.

Jud crossed over to a bench on which there was a balance and some other stuff and placed the hunk of mystery on one tray of the balance. On the other tray he placed a ten-gram weight. The balance swayed a little and then came to rest on the zero mark, showing the stuff weighed exactly ten grams. Then he placed another ten-gram weight on the tray and the balance came to rest on the zero mark, showing the stuff weighed exactly twenty grams!

"Now watch," he said. He placed the silver chunk on the same side as the two ten-gram weights, leaving the tray it had been in absolutely empty. The balance fluctuated a little and again came to rest on the zero mark, showing a minus twenty grams!

By that time I had stopped believing what my eyes told me.

"That's quite a trick," I said skeptically. "How do you work it?" And I stooped to look under the table, hoping to see a setup of magnets hidden there that would help restore my belief in my sanity.

"I don't work it," Jud exclaimed irritably. "It acts that way itself."

I FORGOT my one o'clock class entirely. Jud and I played around

with that hunk of metallic hydro-carbon most of the afternoon, arguing back and forth about what caused it to do the things it did. I found out that if I thought of beefsteak rare while I looked at it, it would weigh exactly ten pounds, and if I thought of a chicken with its neck being wrung the stuff would float up to the ceiling. I tried all sorts of thoughts on it and got some of the craziest results. But whatever I thought, when I thought of the same thing again I got the same results. But my results were different than Jud's! When he thought of a chicken with its neck being wrung the stuff didn't float up to the ceiling but instead made the floor creak and groan. Finally we took it over to the feed company and put it on their car scales. Then when Jud thought of a chicken with its neck being wrung, we found that the stuff weighed twelve thousand four hundred and eighty pounds! And it was no bigger than a pocket knife!

As we stood there and looked at the feed scales in utter amazement I said, "Look, Jud, we've got something here. I've got an idea. Suppose we rig up a strong resting place for this stuff in my car. Then when I think of the right thing it will push the car forward at any speed I want to go. We'll have to be careful or it will wreck us, but—maybe after we know what we are doing we can build a space ship!"

Well, to cut a long story short, two days later Mallory, the biochemist, Jud Taylor, and I were speeding along the state highway with the needle hovering around eighty-five, the engine out of gear and dead, and a crazy bit of silver stuff encased in a special frame in the dashboard with reinforcing bars down to the chassis holding it steady.

It took two of us to drive the car, though, because one of us had to drive and the other concentrate on the stuff.

Jud had named the stuff "tellepan" before he showed it to me that noon, but I pointed out that tellepan sounded too much like Japanese for turtle, so he renamed it "tellocarbon." Mallory had been wracking his brains trying to figure the chemical composition of the stuff, but all he had found out was that the stuff could not absorb any heat whatever, nor emit any, it had any weight you wanted to give it, and when left alone assumed any weight it seemed to fancy at the moment. Moreover, no reagent could touch it. Even aqua regia and hydrofluoric acid couldn't touch it. It could be manipulated like putty and molded into any shape with a little persuasion; it always remained the same bright silver color, and it seemed to be the connecting link between gravity and thought.

Mallory even got some more bottles of the chemicals he had spilled and spilled them over again, cleaning them up and putting some alcohol in the mess like he had done the first time, but no more tellocarbon appeared. We finally had to face the facts. Tellocarbon was some complex hydro-carbon because all of its basic constituents were hydro-carbons. We had the only bit of it in existence and no more could be made.

AFTER we had driven for a couple of hours, Jud changed his thought to something else and we came to a halt on the highway. No one was in sight so we decided to try our second experiment. For that I had to do the thinking because none of Jud's thoughts seemed to work in the attempts we had made in the laboratory. I brought to my mind's eye the image of a chicken with its neck being wrung. Then made it two of them. The car rose slowly off the ground. Then Jud thought his thoughts that made it move

forward. By regulating the number of dying chickens in my thoughts I could cause the car to rise or sink at will.

Soon we were quite high, or at least Mallory said we were. I looked out of the window to see and the car started to hurtle to the ground. It scared me so much that I almost couldn't calm my mind enough to think of chickens, but finally made it just in time. By a supreme effort of will I managed to get the car down safely on the highway again. Then I gave in to my emotions and shook like a leaf.

We had had enough for the day, so we covered up the tellocarbon and started the motor, getting back to the U at dusk.

When we alighted from the car in front of the boarding house in which Mallory and I stayed, we were still a little shaky over our narrow escape. We stood on the sidewalk by the car for a moment trying to decide whether to go up to my room, to Mallory's or down the street a block to Jud's house. We compromised on Pokey's Malt Shop at the corner and finally settled with a sigh of relief in a booth way at the back.

With a round of black coffee in front of us we settled down to business. Nothing less than a space ship would do. Here in our hands, or rather out in my car, we had the secret of untold power. With that little hunk of tellocarbon and a certain amount of concentration on it we could travel to Mars and back like nothing flat. During summer vacation for the last two years Mallory and I had worked in the shipyards and gained practical experience in welding, boilermaking and sheetmetal work. The two of us could build a small space ship by ourselves. All that would be necessary would be to make it airtight, with enough in-

sulation to keep our heat from radiating into space. The rest of the problem involved only ordering stuff from catalogues. Carbon dioxide absorbers, tanks of oxygen, food, various instruments, and so on. That would be Jud's work.

Just as we were finishing our coffees, Lahoma Rice, the secretary in the Dean's office, came in and discovered us. Mallory and I had been more or less competing for her affections for some time. It was the only thing that had ever come between us in our years at college together and the years since then. We both tried to keep it on a friendly basis, but underneath it had become pretty serious.

When we saw her coming Jud whispered quickly, "Keep quiet about all this in front of her. We don't want anybody to know about our amazing discovery at this early date."

Coming over, she slid into the booth beside Jud and flashed a smile at me and Mallory.

"Well, what's all the hush-hush about?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Mallory, looking completely unconcerned.

"Ha, ha. That's right. Absolutely nothing at all," I echoed, to make it more convincing. But somehow it didn't sound quite as convincing as I had intended. Even I noticed that at once, and a secret dangled before the nose of a woman. It awoke in her an undefeatable urge. Before we could rally our forces she was in on the secret and determined to go with us when we went to Mars.

"But Lahoma," Mallory desperately pleaded, "you don't need to come along. I'll be all right."

"I wasn't thinking of you," Lahoma retorted icily, and although she did not look at me as she said that, my heart quickened its tempo at the hidden in-

ference in her words.

So it was settled. The four of us were to go as soon as school let out the next summer. During the winter Malory and I would build the space ship in the old boat house down on the beach just a few blocks from the campus.

IT WAS really fun that winter, working late into the night putting the space ship together. Our crowning achievement was retractible wings for steering the ship in atmosphere. In space, of course, steering would have to be done by small steering rockets. The main drive force, though, would be the missing link, as we had been calling it all winter.

Came the spring, as somebody in the English department might say, and the ship was complete. During the spring months we used the last of our joint resources to stock it with all sorts of things, including seeds for planting, in case we could not get back, or didn't want to come back. Our final load, at the end of the school year, was books. Nothing but books, and literally tons of them on everything from languages to philosophy, from farming to the Bessemer Process.

Then we were ready. During the winter we had all read everything we could get on interplanetary travel. Most of it was, of course, fiction, but each author had his own little idea that we could consider, so that by the time we were ready to shove off we had a fairly complete grasp of every problem we could possibly encounter—or so we fondly hoped.

The ship was cigar-shaped, about eighty feet long and twenty feet in diameter. It had been built so that in space, away from gravity, we could start it spinning with the small rockets and use centrifugal force to keep us on the deck, which lined the shell. There

were ballast tanks to keep one side down when in a gravity field, the water ballast being transferred to the center tube tank before the spin was started, to transfer the center of mass of the ship to the axis of rotation.

We started early in the evening, heading into the east to take advantage of the thousand-mile-an-hour speed of the earth's surface.

The missing link, the hunk of tellocarbon, was encased in a polished brass case in the exact center of gravity of the ship, strong girders connecting it to the shell. A sound-proof booth surrounded it in which the operator would not be distracted. A panel of signal lights was immediately below it where the operator could see it without taking his eyes off the tellocarbon. When we took off I was in the driver's seat, Lahoma standing beside me. We had found that when she thought of hamburger sandwiches the tellocarbon became antigravitational, just as when I thought of chickens being killed.

It took the combined power of our thoughts to lift the ship. As we found out later, the ship rose sluggishly from the water and floated erratically upward, reaching the stratosphere in a little over an hour. By midnight we were over two thousand miles above the Earth's surface and rising more and more rapidly. By then both of us were exhausted and spelling each other off every ten minutes.

Jud was constantly determining our position and speed. At two o'clock in the morning he relieved Lahoma and concentrated on the tellocarbon to give us more forward speed. By eight o'clock in the morning our speed and direction of travel were correct for escape from the Earth's gravity field toward the planet Mars, and I crawled out of the control booth, practically a wreck.

FROM there on it was smooth sailing. We would coast along for two months before nearing Mars, and play with the gadgets we had brought along for taking all sorts of measurements in outer space.

Space is very different than most writers picture it. Instead of being dark it is intensely bright in all directions. It was fortunate that we had movable dark shields on each porthole. By varying the number over a porthole we could block out most of the light and keep our objective in view.

Our most amazing discovery was that the temperature of interplanetary space is not absolutely zero. Our outside thermostat, carefully shielded against all rays, that is, infrared, visible, and ultraviolet, and in the vacuum of space, showed a constant temperature of minus one hundred and three degrees F. at all times in outer space. Jud explained that this was probably due to x-rays and cosmic rays which could penetrate the protective shield.

On the fifty-eighth day after leaving the earth, Jud, at the forward telescope, became suddenly excited. Dashing from the telescope to the chart table he began scribbling figures, ignoring our queries as to what was wrong. After fifteen minutes of figuring he straightened up, a worried frown on his face.

Muttering, "I was afraid of that," he brushed by us to the control booth and slammed the door behind him. A half-hour later he came out and again went to the telescope. Glancing through it, he made adjustments and then read them. Dashing back to the table he again scribbled some figures. When he had finished he stood there, his head bowed, staring at them. Then he looked up at our faces and said solemnly, "What I have been fearing in the back of my mind has happened. The tellocarbon no longer responds to mental

suggestion. It has taken over control of the ship itself and, judging from our present course, we aren't going to ever get to Mars."

"What do you mean?" Lahoma asked.

"I mean," Jud answered slowly, "that at present we have a velocity great enough to escape from the solar system and that it is increasing every moment. Furthermore, a half-hour of concentration on the tellocarbon has not altered our course in the slightest. Wherever we are headed, it is not any planet in this system!"

THE effect of his words cannot be imagined by anyone not in the position we were in. We stood there stunned. Our little, spinning world of iron and steel kept on spinning. Our gravity, which we had become accustomed to, was different in many ways than flat gravity. For example, our floor was curved, yet a dime dropped on it would roll in any direction along the curve just like it was a flat surface. But something near the center tube of the ship was practically weightless. So the center of gravity of our bodies was not the same as its center of mass. This made itself felt in thousands of little things. Heart action, sense of balance, and even in walking.

Picture, if you can, Jud standing several feet from me, his body forming an angle of about thirty degrees with mine, both of our bodies erect, our expressions serious. Picture also Lahoma and Mallory, their bodies at still different angles. Throw in the absolute silence of that moment. Not a single sound except our breathing, not even a creak from the ship. If there had only been a cricket to chirp, or a snake, or a fly buzzing, to make it seem like good old terra firma—but there was only the interstellar silence and the absolute lack

of vibration in the air and the ship. And nearly two months of it, soaked into the marrow of our bones.

I for one would have welcomed a hit against the hull at that moment to take us out of ourselves and make us fight for our existence. Anything except the silent impersonal inexorableness of the lonely universe.

In ten more months our food would be exhausted. In two years our air could no longer be renewed because the chemicals which renewed it would be no good. Our water supply would last forever, with the system of recovery by distillation we had set up. But what is a year's food supply? If we tossed the tellocarbon out into the void and rode free it would be hundreds of years before our ship again entered the solar system in its long ellipse. And if we kept the tellocarbon in, the ship, in another week even that hope would be gone. We could never return! UNLESS we could regain control of the tellocarbon.

Lahoma voiced the question that came to all our minds at the same time.

"What could possibly be the cause of the change in the tellocarbon?" And none of us had an answer.

But that was the key to our salvation. IF we could regain control of the tellocarbon we could at least return to Earth and give up our grand plans of exploration and discovery. Not a one of us would have been unwilling to return to good old PU at that moment and stay there, living our humdrum lives for the rest of our days!

"We'd better get busy," I said, taking the initiative. "We must cut a bit of the tellocarbon off the parent chunk and experiment with it. We must also keep constant check on our course to find out just what accelerating force is now acting, and whether it changes any. And we must all think of everything we

can that might be the cause of this revolt of the tellocarbon."

SUITING my actions to my words I got a wood chisel out of the tool locker and went into the booth, going to work on the missing link. To my surprise I had no trouble obtaining a thin slice of the silvery stuff. It lay in my hand, apparently as tame as any other substance.

I carried it out of the booth and laid it on the desk. The four of us stood looking at it. Suddenly it jumped forward and plastered itself against the forward porthole frame. We felt a slight lurch. The ship was gaining speed!

What had happened? In all our experience with the stuff it worked only by thought. It had jumped forward, and the lurch of the ship told us that the parent chunk as well as the sliver had acted together! Only one thing could account for that. Some intelligence was controlling it. Some intelligence so powerful that it could reach across space and blank out our control completely, taking over the direction of our ship!

We crowded around the forward porthole and peered out. Somewhere, far ahead, was our destination. And at our destination some creature of vast mental power was aware of our presence. Was forcing us to come to it. We were all aware of that without speaking.

Suddenly Lahoma began to laugh hysterically. The insane noise shattered the silence with painful abruptness. I grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. Her laughter changed to sobs.

And now the acceleration of the ship had become so great that it was hard to stand erect. The rubber soles of our shoes was all that kept us from sliding to the stern of the ship.

Lahoma got hold of herself by a tremendous effort, and shook off my arm which I had placed around her to keep her from falling.

"Look," she said to us, "maybe there isn't any super intelligence sucking us into outer space. Maybe it's our own thoughts. I don't know how the rest of you have been feeling, but for several days now I have had a fear of outer space that has been growing simply terrific. Something like the fear of falling as you look over the edge of a cliff. Could that have anything to do with what's going on?"

"Maybe that's it!" Jud exclaimed. "We don't know half enough about this stuff. It could be that such a fear would make it do the very thing feared."

As if in answer, the ship stopped accelerating.

"That **MUST** be it!" Mallory shouted.

"We have a clue I hadn't thought of," Jud added. Looking at me he went on, "When you think of a chicken with its head being wrung, what thought goes with it?"

"Why," I hesitated, "I think of a swell chicken dinner."

"I think of how awful it is to kill!" Jud exclaimed. "It doesn't react to the idea but to the emotion."

We experimented from that basis—without result. The tellocarbon was in complete revolt. It paid no attention to us.

TWO more days and we had to admit we were licked. Jud voiced what we had all begun to suspect.

"The tellocarbon must have developed a mind of its own," he said dispiritedly. "We should have taken that into account. It reacts to thought, so undoubtedly it has a few of the properties of the mind. What we must try to do now is reason with it—try to find out

why it has become uncooperative. Let's all concentrate on that question and direct it at the tellocarbon and see what happens."

We tried it. Nothing seemed to happen for quite a while.

"An idea just came into my mind," Lahoma said suddenly. "It's absurd. I just thought, 'Suppose there is another chunk of tellocarbon out here and our chunk is lonesome?' The way it has been cruising around the past few days and ignoring us, it might have sensed another piece like it out here and be looking for it!"

"That's funny," I spoke up. "The thought just occurred to me too!"

"Me too," Mallory exclaimed.

"Then it must be so," Jud said. "Obviously the thought came from the tellocarbon in reply to our question!"

"But how can it think?" Mallory questioned. "After all it was precipitated as a fine film, and you can quash it and even slice it up without any trouble."

"In science," Jud said, "you don't try to argue away facts. You accept the facts and go on from there."

"Let's go on from there, then," Lahoma spoke up. "Tillie—we might as well call her that now that we know she, the tellocarbon, you know, thinks—is looking for a companion. We might as well help her look."

"How do you know it isn't a him?" I asked.

"Oh, just a feeling," Lahoma replied.

"Oh, fine," Mallory groaned. "We should have suspected it was a female the way it started galivanting all over the solar system."

"So that's the way you think of us females, Mallory!" Lahoma exclaimed angrily.

I smiled to myself. A few more remarks like that from Mallory and I would have the field to myself. IF we

ever got back to the Earth, which I doubted. Secretly I agreed with Mallory. If the chunk of tellocarbon was a female we had much less of a chance than if it were a male or an it.

Jud went to the telescope and started looking for a stray chunk of silvery looking stuff. An air of semi-hopelessness began to settle over all of us. The chances of finding such a thing were extremely slim.

Almost at once, though, Jud let out an exclamation of triumph. We rushed to his side and took turns looking into the telescope. There, less than a quarter of a mile ahead of us, was something that flashed with silvery brilliance like the belly of a trout in a clear stream. We followed the flashes and soon figured out that Tillie was not searching for her companion, but had found him long ago and was, female like, pursuing him!

WHEN the distance between them shortened, the silvery chunk ahead of us speeded up. When the distance between us increased, it slowed down again. It was obviously enjoying the chase.

"This could go on forever," Mallory groaned, sticking his foot in his mouth again.

Lahoma ignored the opening.

"It's obvious what we must do," she said, sounding quite capable. "Tillie needs a little advice on love making. I'm quite sure that Oscar, or whatever his name is, would pursue Tillie if she stopped CHASING him. We've got to convince her of that and get her to try it."

Evidently she didn't need convincing. She got the idea direct from Lahoma and acted on it. The silver flash ahead swung away. Half an hour later it showed up in the stern telescope.

This seemed to delight Tillie, the

tellocarbon, no end. She cavorted about like a drunken puppy, giving us all a bad case of sea sickness.

"Now," Lahoma gasped. "We must coax Tillie into setting us back on Earth. I don't know how you men feel, but I would be quite willing to turn Tillie loose so she could join her mate—once we were safely home."

"But if we did that we wouldn't be able to explore the Solar System!" Jud exclaimed.

"And if we don't we'll probably wind up flattened against some asteroid as soon as Tillie decides to break out of her shell," Lahoma snapped.

I blanched at the thought. Mallory's knees buckled and he sat down on the floor weakly. Jud himself swayed a little.

That eventuality just hadn't occurred to us before. Obviously Tillie would get tired of the chase and want to settle down and get cozy some day. If she hadn't acquired the idea from us she might figure it out by herself and dash us against some jagged bit of space rock.

"All right. All right," Jud said weakly. "Let's see if we can talk Tillie into taking us back home in exchange for her freedom. As an arguing point you might all visualize the smashed ship, with her still imprisoned and all of us dead and unable to help free her."

An invisible hand seemed to push us to the back of the ship. We were picking up speed faster than we ever had before.

I slowly climbed to the forward telescope and looked through it. Dead center was a small twinkling Earth with the Moon hovering near it.

I informed the rest. They shouted with relief. We were on our way home!

The stern telescope showed the other piece of tellocarbon following us—almost sniffing at our heels. It held there,

day after day, while the Earth grew larger and larger.

AT THE last Jud stood at the telescope and directed us in. After circling about ten thousand miles up until Puget Sound was directly below us, Tillie dipped down in obedience to his unspoken command.

The whistling sound of atmosphere on the shell was the sweetest music ever played by gods or men!

We landed on Puget Sound opposite the campus. The minute we touched shore I took a wrench and unscrewed the framework that held the tellocarbon in place in the center tube. I could feel a rapid, excited vibration as it waited—I mean she.

No sooner was the last bolt loosened than she darted away. She almost reached the open porthole where Mallory had taken his first breath of fresh air when she stopped and returned.

Tillie, the silvery blob of matter, came back and touched my cheek softly. Then she did the same to Lahoma.

We wasted no time in climbing out of the ship to the shore. There we looked up. Far over our heads were two silver flashes of brilliance that zoomed in ever-widening spirals.

I felt someone beside me and glanced down. Lahoma was standing there. Cautiously I put my arm around her waist.

With a starry look in her bright eyes as she glanced at me, she twined her arm around me. Then we looked up again.

Far above we saw a wonderful sight. The two silver flashes seemed to come together. There was a blinding light as from a tremendous explosion; but unlike an explosion it remained bright. It was like a morning star—a sun, far, far away. It grew smaller and smaller until at last it seemed just another star

twinkling in the heavens.

There was an aftermath. We sold the space ship to a Ferry Boat company and they transformed it into a streamlined excursion boat with a conventional motor to drive it. But that isn't what I'm talking about.

Lahoma and I got married shortly after. I had sense enough to capitalize on the romance of the tellocarbons and proposed right then and there. She accepted, of course.

But it was two years later when our first child was born—little William Lawrence. One Sunday we were down at the beach strolling along, pushing the go-cart in the twilight.

A full moon beamed down upon us and a million stars twinkled in the clear sky. The waves washed with sleepy sounds against the sandy shore and now and then a sea gull came close enough so we could hear the swishing of its wings.

Into this pleasant scene came a sound—at first so faint it could hardly be heard. It was a shrill scream of some object hurtling through the atmosphere above, almost like the whine of plane struts, only much higher pitched.

Lahoma and I glanced up. There, far up, something silvery flashed. As our eyes adjusted themselves we saw that there were at least two of them, and they were coming closer.

Just as they seemed about to crash into the sandy beach they paused. There were two large pieces of silvery substance and five small pieces.

They hovered near us, quivering and scintillating. Then one of the two larger ones came over and touched my cheek softly. The warmth of its touch was almost human.

With coruscating brilliance it left me to pause and touch Lahoma's cheek. Then it darted down the beach, the other large piece just behind it, and the

five little ones trailing along.

Lahoma put her arm around my waist and looked up into my eyes. And

we both chuckled and chuckled and chuckled.

THE END

★ CHINESE MAGIC ★

By SANDY MILLER

IT SEEMS evident that the keynote of Chinese magic is the absolute power of the sign, the letter, the written word. Any illness can be prevented, happy events can be brought about, and unhappy ones can be warded off by swallowing the ashes of the paper on which an invocation or exorcism has been written. Their universal magic is in writing. Amulets made on parchment paper bearing formulas are most universally used. In most houses magic images with written explanations take an important place.

Magic practices nearly unchanged through the centuries accompany the Chinese from the moment of conception through death. Chinese couples desire large families, and to this end magic rites require the intervention of fantastic animals such as the unicorn and phoenix. The image of Koan-Kong occupies the place of honor in the bed-chamber of a newly-wedded Chinese couple. He was a Chinese scholar and his image pictures him as offering a child wearing the cap of learning. When a young mother does not deliver her child as rapidly as she should, talismans and amulets written on pieces of paper by the priests are pasted on her nude body. As soon as the child is born, his horoscope is cast to determine just what obstacles he will have to meet during his life. Arrows are shot in every direction to put malignant demons to flight, for parents live in fear of

the visit of a witch that may steal their child or may take the form of a dog and bring misfortune. Children are sometimes given the name of an animal in the hopes of fooling the evil spirits. Bells were often tied to the feet of small children to frighten away the demons. A most unusual amulet is the "garment of a hundred families." The mother asks all her neighbors and friends for a small piece of cloth and she sews them all into a garment for her child which is sure to protect him since everyone has contributed for this purpose.

The magic ceremonies performed after death are important to the cult of the dead. One ceremony was called the "house of paper." On the forty-ninth day after death, a house is built of paper. It contains furniture, utensils and even servants, and in general represents the home of the deceased. The home is then burned in the belief that it will be transferred into the world beyond in this way. There it will again be tenanted by the spirit of the dead.

Straw crowns were placed on the graves of children to prevent the celestial dog from eating them. The crown represented a magic circle into which an evil spirit could not penetrate. Imitation paper money and coins were placed in graves to enable the dead to pay their fare "across the bridge."

★ PINTO CULTURE HOUSE ★

By JON BARRY

EVIDENCE of what appears to be the oldest human habitation in North America has been unearthed at a prehistoric campsite in the desert one hundred and eighty miles northeast of Los Angeles. A series of post holes have been uncovered which archeologists believe were left by the poles of a three thousand to ten thousand year old Pinto culture house. The holes outline a one room dwelling of rectangular shape seven feet wide and twelve feet long. Stone utensils, arrow heads and other tools were found on the floor. They were Pinto relics that indicate that the find is ancient and not a specimen of the modern Paiute Indians.

★ RADAR CONTROLLED RATS ★

By A. MORRIS

DR. JOSEPH A. Gengerelli has devised a method for installing miniature radios in the heads of rats to test the effects of electrical brain stimulation. The psychology professor at the University of Los Angeles said that he made this device to observe the speed of learning, retention, irritability, excitability and many other behavior traits which might be influenced by electric shock. The rat is equipped with a tiny, built-in crystal radio. The professor "sends" the rats by a small signal generator which is actually a radar transmitter, emitting short wave impulses at a very high frequency.



ONCE UPON A PLANET

by J. J. ALLERTON

ONCE upon a planet there was a mighty warlord. The warlord's name was Miotis. Some might think it an odd name, but then it is entirely probable that the people of this planet would think the name of Smith or Jenkovitz odd. Be that as it may, however, the important thing is that Miotis was the name of this warlord, whatever one may feel about his name.

Now, Miotis was not just a mighty warrior, he was the *mightiest* warrior

on the planet. As such, he controlled the life of every person there. For isn't it a truism that war bends men's destiny in the strangest fashions? So Miotis, with his entire life devoted to the art of destruction, was able to direct the lives of his subjects.

But one day, to his consternation and amazement, he found that the peoples of his planet had wearied of the sport of war. In the middle of his last campaign, his men as well as his enemies had laid down their arms



They flung themselves upon
him from all sides and bound
him hand and foot

**The mighty King Miotis came down to Earth
to recapture his lost desire for war. But what he
saw on this planet, caused him to feel differently.**

and had refused to carry on as was their wont. And no amount of threat or punishment could make them change.

On this particular day when our story starts, Miotis was in his palace, his massive head leaning against a muscular palm, and his gaze intent on the face of his vizier, Kannot. It was not the sort of face Miotis was especially fond of seeing, for it was old, wrinkled, full of cunning and wisdom.

The vizier was, as always, full of words, and as he spoke one blunt finger tapped the side of his rather bulbous nose: "So you think it strange, mighty Miotis, to find that life is boring?"

"I do not find that *life* is boring," Miotis replied. "Life is never boring. It is *I* who am bored. That is the reason I called you here. I could have called any one of my nine hundred concubines for enjoyment, or had my warders drag forth some of my

prisoners and found sport in torturing them. Yet, I did not, and I wonder why. In the past, these diversions made pleasant the passing of time. Now, I feel an ennui too great to even want to bother to summon one of these which used to give me so much pleasurable excitement.

"Tell me, vizier, have I become so full of war that I cannot live without it?"

Kannot clasped his hands behind him and rocked back and forth for several seconds, the while he bent a thoughtful and appraising eye upon his King. For Kannot knew the vagaries of the man before him and knew that a single word, a single gesture which would displease the great Miotis, would make fewer Kannot's days. Therefore, when he spoke again, it was with care, weighing his words so that he could give his opinion and yet not endanger his life.

"Methinks, oh greatest and wisest of Kings," Kannot said, "that since war has but a single end, something phenomenal in the universe must have occurred to make that end seem less reasonable."

He lowered his eyes, yet made sure he could peer beneath the hooded lids to see how his words were affecting Miotis. There was no sign on the other's face to show how he felt.

Kannot continued, "By that, I mean death may have become less attractive as a means of immortality. Is it not true, also, that you, the greatest and most noble of warriors, has yourself felt this same reluctance recently to even plan a war?"

The warlord's head nodded slightly in agreement.

"Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that some force of which we have no knowledge has made its presence felt—"

"Now you have presented the problem," Miotis interrupted. "But it is not enough. I want a solution. Already I am weary of this do-nothing life, though it is but a week since we have laid down arms."

Kannot made a sign of obeisance.

"Now go," Miotis said, "and seek out the cause and the solution. One week, vizier, I give you. No more! Your head shall roll, otherwise . . ."

THE trumpets announced the arrival of the vizier, and at the sound the players stopped their tune and the dancers their dance. Miotis, looking as though he hadn't stirred from the position Kannot had left him in the week before, lifted his eyes to the bent figure making its way across the immense length of the hall.

"Mighty Miotis," Kannot began, his head bent and his eyes lowered in the correct attitude of court procedure.

"I bid you speak," Miotis said.

"My Lord, the words I have to say are for your ears alone," Kannot continued.

The warlord waved a hand, and as if by magic the court was emptied but for the guards who never left their posts.

"Speak, old one," Miotis commanded.

"I have found the cause, mighty one," Kannot said. "A surprising one, however, and perhaps an unbelievable one . . ."

The vizier did not look up, and his face betrayed nothing of what he felt. Yet, his aged heart was beating as if it wanted to escape the flesh in which it was imprisoned. The next words he would utter could spell his doom.

"I sent couriers in every direction, to all the courts of all the lands, to our friends as well as to our enemies. And on their return I discovered one

fact in common: Not a single nation was interested in war. Something happened to each—"

"Old one," Miotis broke in, "you weary me with these boring details. Come to the point! I know we are all tired dealing death. Why?"

"Because anger has fled from our minds and hearts," Kannot said, and his head lifted. He had spoken the words which had lain in him, the terrible words which could mean his death. And now the die was cast. The proof of his assertion would soon be shown.

An oddly bitter smile broke on the face of the man on the throne. It was the smile of a man who had learned the taste of utter defeat.

"So you have told me that which I knew in my heart," Miotis said. "Strange, that I, who loved nothing better than the sound of a sword's blow against armor, should even find the touch of steel repugnant now. Yet, it is so. I cannot carry a knife without having my flesh crawl, even though a scabbard protects me against its touch. Shall we all become a nation of shepherds? Shall we never again know the glory of battle? Tell me, vizier. Perhaps age has lent you an inner wisdom?"

"Wisdom's words are for the historian," Kannot replied. "I, Kannot, have no time for talk. The planning of deeds is my way. And I have a plan.

"Anger must be found again!" Kannot's voice rose shrilly. "It is our only salvation. But, mighty Miotis, we must look elsewhere than on this planet. There is a planet called Earth . . ."

MIoTIS' brow knit in thought. A planet called Earth, he thought. H'mm! But how were they to get to it? And having got there, did Kannot want them to invade? No, that

couldn't be it. Already, the very thought of invading for purposes of conquest went against him.

" . . . On that planet," Kannot continued, "wars and death by violence are commonplace. There is never a day or week that does not pass but that somewhere men fight men. What better goal do we need?"

"You have done well," Miotis said. "I could ask for no more. Yet a question persists in my mind. How can you arrange for anger to come to the breasts of us here from the planet beyond the grey mists of outer space? We have no space ships, nor for that matter, the means of making them."

"I speak not of space ships or of men using them," Kannot responded, "for in that matter we have no choice. My thought was in another direction and using another means. I have discovered the way to make a soul-transfer. To put it into words you will better understand, I can do what death does, hold a soul in suspense."

"Which is supposed to have what meaning to me?" Miotis asked.

"Simply this," Kannot said, "I can make a single soul fly through the vast boundaries of space and into another human body which will be waiting for it. There is but a single man I know who can serve as vehicle—you, mighty Chieftain."

For the first time, Miotis' features showed change from the set expression he wore as a sign of his Kingship. Amazement made him blink, and the hand holding his chin fell to the side of the throne, the fingers tapping against the rich cloth. But after a minute, his face cleared and he looked with brighter interest at his vizier.

"Of course," he said. "Who else should go? And already I have a plan of action. Now tell me what must be done and how soon . . ."

BLY STANTON rolled over and groaned aloud. His hand shook as he lifted it to feel a throbbing temple. His fingers felt a sticky wetness, and memory returned to him—the raiding party of Himlo men, his discovery of them, and the alarm he had sounded, the fight, and then the blow which had felled him.

He rolled onto his stomach, shoved his hands under him and heaved himself erect. A sigh of relief escaped his lips. Except for the buzzing in his brain, he felt all right.

Stanton looked down at his dust-covered clothes, and his fingers brushed at the dirt and mud, but when they came to his shirt they halted. There was a hole in his shirt, high up, near the heart. It was not a hole exactly, but rather a slit which could have been made either with a knife or sword. There was a dried welt of blood surrounding the skin. A shudder passed through his tall, strong frame, as he realized that it was a miracle he was alive. For whatever had done the damage had penetrated deep into the flesh.

The moon was full, and after a few seconds had passed, Stanton bent and searched for his weapon which, he was sure, would be close at hand. But as he found and picked up the long, double-edged sword, a shudder of distaste went through him, and he dropped his weapon and let it lay there.

Once more his fingers brushed at the wetness on his temple. He wondered why the blood was still coming from his head wound, while the cut in his chest had dried up.

He peered around to see if his attackers were anywhere in the vicinity, and decided that his immediate location was clear of danger. Another instant of orientation, and Bly Stanton bent low and scurried from one

patch of cover to another until he reached his goal, the tunnel mouth. Here he would be safe for the present. The Himlo would not dare to follow him here.

His eyes, long accustomed to the sight of the broken arch, passed over the inscription worn deeply and almost illegibly on the green-with-age metal—*Chicago Greater Subway, 2107 A.D.* He was interested only in knowing whether or not danger lurked in the shadows. Again he sniffed. A small smile stole across his mouth. Then the lips tightened in their wonted thin slit, and he started forward at a long lope into the darkness.

Here and there were offshoots, darker passages which disappeared into the Stygian gloom. But his path led straight ahead. Then he was before a barricade of rocks, the barrier which his men had placed against the coming of their enemies.

"Ho, John!" Stanton shouted.

THE walls echoed the sound, which was followed by a dying whimper of a voice. "Hi . . . Hi! Who goes . . . ?"

"'Tis I, Bly Stanton," Stanton yelled.

There was a short interval of silence, then a concerted roar of glee, and a dozen men clambered over the rock pile. They shouted his name as they all tried to touch him at once, and there was adoration in their welcome as they pulled and hauled at him.

At length he managed to free himself of their embraces, and as he stood apart, he asked: "What happened? Did I manage to warn enough of our men?"

"Warn us and knock their ambush into a cocked hat. They fell to pieces and ran like scared rabbits when we hit them from all sides. But Mark Smith saw you fall, and he said that

the sword which was thrust into you went all the way in to the hilt," one of them said.

"I guess Mark was looking from the wrong angle," Stanton explained. "For sure I'm all in one piece. Got a bloody knock on the head, though. Well, let's get back to quarters. I've got a piece I want to talk over with you all."

A hundred torches made a smoky light of the pitch which otherwise would have been in the vast cavern-like room. Three hundred and ten men stood about in various attitudes of attention, all listening to the tall man perched on a flat piece of concrete, facing them.

"I cannot explain why I feel this way," Bly Stanton was saying. "But this I know, and for sure! No more killing for me. No more hiding in stinking places like this, waiting for the sun to go down so a man can venture out and be a man. No, sirs! Bly Stanton is going out, and in broad daylight. Bly Stanton is going out and bloody well away from this place, out to where the sun hits hills and trees and open spaces. And Bly Stanton is going alone if he has to . . ."

It was an ultimatum, they knew.

MARK SMITH, a short, swarthy-faced man in breeches clipped short at the knees and a leather jerkin for a shirt, stepped forward and waved a casual hand to get his leader's attention.

"I take it, Bly," he said, "that you are bound to leave. Well, that part may be all right. Surely you have a right to leave if you want to. But by the same token you must grant us the right to ask why. We have been together too long for so abrupt a leaving-taking."

"And right you are, Mark," Bly replied. "I owe that and more to each and every one of you. Three hundred

odd of us, all who are left of millions. And against us, as they have been for a hundred years, the Himlo. And how many of them are left, would you say? A thousand? Not many more, surely. Think, men, some thirteen hundred men, perhaps a few more. No children, no women, just men.

"I don't have to tell you what happened three hundred years ago. History has no meaning to us any more. For are we not eternal? Death can only come to us by violence. Well, not any more for me. Bly Stanton has come to life. That is how I felt when I came to back there in the ruins, that a new life had been granted me. Well, I intend to live it fully, at peace. I tell you, Mark, and you, John, and Abel and all the rest of you, when I picked up the weapon which I had dropped to the ground, it was as if I had picked up a live coal. I could not wear it, the brand of murder. For we are all murderers, we and the Himlo—"

"Again," Mark Smith interrupted, "I agree with you. We and our enemies are murderers. Thirteen hundred and some odd murderers. And before we are done, there will be less. But that is how we have lived for too many years. So many, we can no longer change our ways. Peace is a lost word with us."

"With you!" Stanton said sharply. "But not with me! I have found it again. And I do not intend losing it quickly. I say I leave these scenes and these ways. Tonight. Who will leave with me?"

He looked about with expectant eyes, but the light in them died as his gaze swept the cavernous depths and looked into face after face and saw not a single one which agreed with him. It was not so much a sign of revolt, but an acceptance of a fact three hundred years old.

"Then I go alone," he said with finality. "This has become a bitter world, a world without woman or child, but it is the only world we will ever know. And I am going to live peacefully in it. Good-bye."

They opened their ranks to let him pass. Until the last of them was reached, Bly Stanton thought there would be no answer to his farewell. Then a tall, thin man stepped in front of him. He was Grant Hays, one of the four with Smith, John and Abel, who formed the inner leaders under Stanton. Grant and Bly had always been the closest of friends.

"Bly," Hays said, his eyes steadfast and warm. "Wait. Before you go . . . There is more than man to meet out there. The Himlo are one thing, nature another. You must take weapons."

STANTON shook his head hard. "No!" his voice thundered, and sent echoes answering from the walls. "No! I will never draw a blade against even a rat. The old races had their sayings—one I remember well—'Live and let live.'"

"Good-bye, then, Bly Stanton," Hays said. "And good luck."

Bly Stanton did not turn as he clambered over the rock ramparts. And after a while the night hid him in its sable fold.

The man climbed the last ridge of the giant sand dune and looked down at a setting moon sending a long slanting fan of silver over an immense lake. He had seen the lake many years before, had almost forgotten its existence so long ago had it been.

He turned and looked at the ruins, rising pyramid-like from the tree line to the north. Chicago had been the name of a vast city which had existed here. There had been other cities as large, and some larger. From the deep-

est recesses of his mind, Stanton remembered an almost forgotten fact. There had been more than three *billion* people on the Earth at one time. Then, on an afternoon long gone, a bomb was dropped on one of the cities. It had been called an atom bomb. The name of the destroyed city was soon forgotten, as were the other cities which were soon wiped off the face of the Earth. For man had discovered in the atom bomb a weapon which proved to be the agency of his destruction. It led to bigger bombs, better bombs, more efficient bombs, and at the last a bomb which by chain reaction killed almost all the people on Earth. And those whom it did not kill it made sterile.

That was the beginning of the end. For in the new way of life, the force of creation died. Men thought of nothing but hatred of other men. So they fought, first with weapons of complex design. Then, as the creative desire was stifled, the weapons became more simple, until at the last man went back to a sword and a knife blade for his murderous tasks.

But it was in the death of woman that man suffered his worst loss. With sterility, woman felt their reason for existence was no longer justified. And so they died, one by one, until now there was no record of any.

* * *

THESE were the thoughts of Bly Stanton as he plodded over the ridge of another dune. Then, all thoughts were wiped from his mind. He dropped to his knees at the sight of the blaze in the hollow between two dunes directly below.

Their proximity to the fire and the light of the moon combined to make their features readily discernible. There was no mistaking the Mongoloid features of Himlo men. And if that was

not enough, two of them were dressed in garments of fur which would have identified them immediately. The wind was coming from their direction, so Bly was safe for the moment. They had keen senses of smell, and had the wind been otherwise, Bly would have been discovered.

He retreated like some huge beetle, on all fours, backward, as if he had been suddenly confronted by a larger beetle. When he had traveled some few yards and saw only the serrated ridge of sand interposed between him and the sky, he rose, turned, and started for the edge of the water.

Though he felt no fear of these men, Bly found it the better part of discretion to move swiftly from their path. He ran at a trot, a long lope which covered ground with a minimum of effort. The whole of the night went by, and still Bly Stanton moved in the easy pace he had set himself. The dawn found his lean figure bounding along the edge of the sand.

Hunger forced him to pause, then, and seek food. There was wild fruit on trees a half mile inland. He ate some apples, and washed down the meager meal with water from a spring. Then he found shelter and lay down to sleep. Travel by night, he reasoned, was the best way.

The sound of voices awakened him. They were voices the timbre of which he had never heard before. He parted the brush under which he had lain through the day, and peered out cautiously. His eyes widened at the sight they saw. Strange creatures, a tribe of which he knew nothing, squatted in the sand a hundred feet from the water. They wore tight-fitting garments which hugged their bodies so tightly that every curve was clearly outlined. And they had figures which were not familiar to Stanton.

It was not strange, for these were women.

HAD Bly Stanton been less interested in what he was seeing and more alert to what was closer at hand, he would perhaps have escaped the noose which suddenly slipped over his shoulders and pinioned his arms neatly to his side. Bodies encased in metal jackets leaped upon him and made useless his struggles. He was jerked to his feet, and voices shouted to others below to come forward. He understood the words, for they were speaking in the same tongue that was his.

There was a Naila, a Valis, another called simply She, and a tall strong woman, older than the rest, called Mary. Mary seemed to be the leader, or at least the one with the most authority. It was to her Bly was brought.

"Mary," one of the guards said, "the first of what we hoped to find."

The woman looked at the man appraisingly. He was the first she had ever seen. He seemed of good stock. She was quick to note he wore no weapons. It surprised her, for even if he had no enemies, there would be wild animals about.

"Yes," Mary said softly, "the first. Then the book was true. There *are* men in this world." She made a sound of laughter deep in her throat, stopped, then said to Bly, "We have come a long way. Do you talk? Can you tell me whether there are others like you?"

"Like me and different," Bly replied.

The women exchanged glances.

Mary spoke again: "How do you mean?"

It did not take long for Bly Stanton to tell the history of the three hundred men of his group, and that of the Mongoloid Himlo men, the last of the invaders who were the remnants of those

who came across from Asia. All the while he spoke, his senses were full of these women. There was a long silence when he finished his tale.

"The books did not lie then," the one called Naila said. "And what about children . . . ?" her voice faded.

"The last of the great bombs did irreparable damage," Mary said. "But we will talk of that later. You have told us that there is a battle to the death between you and these Himlos. Then why are you unarmed? Where are your weapons?"

It was the first time Bly had been asked the question directly. And it was the first time he had to think about it. He let his mind assemble the facts in their proper order, and after a while he spoke:

"I do not *know* why, except that I no longer want to know either the touch or feel of a sword or knife. I do not want to harm anyone. Nor can I explain why I feel this way."

Suddenly one of the women made a sound of horror. They turned to her and saw she was staring in fascination at the torn part of Stanton's shirt where the sword blade had entered. Mary and several others gathered closer, and Mary parted the fabric to see the wound better.

"Look!" she exclaimed in wonder. "How deep it is."

For the first time, then, Bly Stanton saw the wound for what it was, a death wound. He wondered—had he become immortal?—not in the sense he knew, but in actuality, where death even by violence was not the end.

He put out his hand and said: "Let me have a blade."

Without hesitation, Mary handed him the blade which hung at her right side. Placing the point against the flesh, he put both hands about the hilt and plunged it deep into him with all

his strength, until only the hilt was to be seen.

Miraculously, he felt no pain. The blade when Stanton withdrew the steel showed virgin as it had entered, and not a drop of crimson dyed the entrance it had made in the flesh.

One of the women put into words what they all felt: "This is magic. Death is gone forever now."

It was in that very instant that the soul of Miotis entered into the body of Bly Stanton.

STANTON felt a sudden elation.

More, a consciousness of vast powers. He was immune to death. But were his companions? He looked Mary full in the eyes as he said: "It seems that nothing can kill me now, even violence. What of you?"

She knew what he meant. And with as little hesitation as he had shown, did what he did with the blade in her fingers. Her face in an instant became a grotesque mask of pain and horror. A fountain of blood poured from the self-inflicted wound. She tried to say something as she sank to her knees, but nothing came out.

"Only he is immortal," Naila said, awed. "For look! Mary is already gone. Hail immortal . . ."

It was the acknowledgement of his supremacy.

He took advantage of it on the instant. "Good. I can use you all. We must first rid ourselves of these men, my enemies. Come, call the others of your tribe and I will lead you to them."

He knew without being told that there were many more of these women. For surely not so few would have come, armed as they were, into a strange land. At his words, several of them sped around a headland which hid the cove beyond. Naila took his arm and

led him forward. His eyes widened when he saw the four sailing ships in the large bay beyond the headland.

There were five hundred women all armed and all ready and willing, when they heard the situation, to do his bidding. Nor did he take long to give his commands.

Daylight was breaking when they came to the tunnel which was the headquarters for the tribe from which Bly Stanton had come. He deployed his forces with the greatest of care, making sure the surprise would be complete when he came out. Then he entered. He knew at this hour that his men would be asleep. He was right. There were two hundred of the women with him, and these he placed all along the tunnel length, telling them to hide in the recesses along the walls.

HIS voice awakened his men. They crowded round him when he clambered over the barricade, and at the sight of the sword in the place where he usually carried it smiles broke on their lips.

"Bly! We have you with us again," Mark exclaimed.

"But of course," Bly said. "It must have been the knock on the head I got in the fight with the Himlos. But now it's clear. And I have news for you. We can get rid of our enemies in one fell swoop. They are as foolish as we. They too sleep in the daytime. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Are you sure?" Mark asked.

"Certain. I have seen them."

"Then let us wait no longer. By the time they come to their senses, it will be too late."

And it was. Only not as Mark had thought. For the immortal Stanton had become battle-crazed, and whether loyal comrade or enemy, he knew only to kill violently. It was Stanton him-

self who delivered the death blow to his good friend. The rest of his group fell easy prey to the women, who were even more savage than Stanton. It wasn't until it was all over that Bly noticed what his women companions had done. Each and every one of them carried a trophy hung in her belt, a horrible thing which leaked blood. They had cut the heads from those they killed.

All that day and the next and until the last of the Mongoloids had been eliminated, they hunted. They were no longer five hundred women when they were finished. But there were no more men, either. Each of the women carried a single head on her belt when they went back to the ships which had brought them. And Bly, also, carried one.

Bly Stanton was no longer the same man as the one whom they had discovered. The blood bath he had been in had done something to him. His nose had become pinched, and his whole face had changed, so that his eyes were narrowed now and his forehead, for some reason, lower. He no longer walked erect, but stooped and shambled oddly as he moved. His jaw jutted forward, and his teeth showed because of it. Little by little, he had found it more comfortable to be without clothes, until by the time they returned to the ships, the only article of clothing he wore was the belt on which hung his sword and knife.

Naïla had taken Mary's place in the scheme of things. Still, she found she had to call Bly her superior. During the long days of slaughter, there had been little need of talk. Muttered directions had done for them.

But as they stood at the edge of the gangplank leading aboard, she said: "Come immortal! There is nothing left for you here."

"Nothing?" he asked, somewhat

blankly. "Nothing . . . ?"

"Of course not," she said. "In all of this world not another like you is left alive."

THROUGH the brain of Bly Stanton shot a thought that was like an arrow—he, alone, of all the males in the world. What sort of world could it be? What was he to do in this world where there was nothing but woman, and man had no place? He peered at these women and saw them for what they were—beasts, cruel and vicious, shaped as humans. There was no compromising with nature. If one did not serve the purpose for which one was intended, then one served another purpose. He looked at these women who were the rulers of this planet and knew they had an empty rule, and a losing fight. For immortality, in the sense in which he had achieved it, was lost to them.

He shook his head from side to side, and slowly turning, started off without a word of farewell.

But Naila was not as Mary. There was a cunning in her which the other had never possessed. Before Stanton had taken more than ten steps, she was at his side. Her sword flashed in a blinding arc as it sped toward the man. There was a sickening sound as the steel met the flesh of the throat. And a bloody geyser bloomed where the head had been. A vicious grin leaped to her lips as she stooped and lifted the head.

But the grin changed to a howl of fear as the eyes suddenly opened and the lips parted and words came from them: "You forgot, Naila. Death comes not to me. Remember?"

She dropped the head and sped for the ship. The others, witness to what happened, followed as quickly as possible. What they did not see, of course,

was that the eyes and lips had closed forever on the instant of their departure.

For it was then that the soul of Miotis left the body of Bly Stanton.

KANNOT removed the mask from Miotis' face. The soul-globe lay to one side. Slowly the eyelids of the warlord raised. For a few seconds his eyes were blank. Then reason came to them.

"Did you . . ." Kannot began, and wet his suddenly dry lips. "Did you get to where I sent you?" he finished.

The eyes of the man on the table blinked as though in signal. The lips moved but feebly.

"Can you talk?" Kannot asked.

"Later," Miotis whispered.

Kannot nodded in understanding. He had an idea of the ordeal his King had been through. The telling of what had happened to him could wait for a while.

Hours went by, and the man on the table slowly gained strength. But it was a long time later before he could talk.

"You sent my soul into the body of a mighty warrior," Miotis said. "Aye. A mighty warrior. I saw and learned many strange things. But of all the things I saw, only one stood out . . ."

"And what was that?" Kannot asked.

"War must die!" Miotis said.

"But war is already dead," Kannot said. "Remember, sire, it is the reason why you allowed the experiment—to seek ways of bringing war back to life."

"No! I saw what war can do to a planet, to man and to woman. It must never come back. From this day forward, the sinews of war will be removed. Look closely at me, Kannot. What do you see?"

It was then Kannot understood. He had transferred the souls of Miotis and of Bly Stanton. But the unforeseen

had taken place. He had not merely transferred the two souls. He had done so permanently. And Bly Stanton, in the body of Miotis, had come to do

what he realized now too late should have been done on the Earth long ago—abolish war forever.

THE END

CLUTCHING SLUDGE



By WILLIAM KARNEY



EVER since the gas engine was invented, men have tried to think of new and better ways of connecting it to its load. Unlike an electric motor, a gas engine possesses the disadvantage that it must be first running at a fairly high rate of speed before it can be connected to whatever it is going to operate. Unlike an electric motor, it can't start from a dead stop. This has always been a problem and a trouble to technicians.

The first solution to the problem is still being used today—in most automobiles. The standard dry-plate clutch, in which two disks are forced against a third disk by springs, has been used for the longest time in cars, has given good service, will be used for some time to come, but is gradually being replaced by more modern variations.

The job that a clutch has to do is to place the load against the running engine gradually and smoothly in order not to stop it or injure it by shock. The dry clutch is capable of doing this but requires care on the part of the driver. The engine must be speeded up from idling speed and the clutch allowed to engage slowly.

Some brilliant combinations of minds thought that the best way to make a connection between a stationary load and a running engine would be by some sort of hydraulic coupling. Probably the idea came from hydraulic shock absorbers and door stops. The result was the various types of "hydromatic" and liquid clutches that are appearing on more and more cars. These work on the principle of "liquid drag." When two plates are placed very near each other and one is rotating, if they are in common contact with a layer of liquid, it is common knowledge that the un-moving member will be dragged into rotation by the moving one through the intervention of the liquid. This is basically the idea behind most "hydromatic" clutches. They work well and are fine except that they require rather elaborate mechanical designs,

hard to maintain and service.

Recently a still better variation of this technique in the form of a turbine was introduced in one of the larger automobiles, and it too is excellent except for the inevitable mechanical complications.

It has been announced that a new method of simplifying the whole thing has been discovered. Here again, two plates are used, simple flat plates much like those in the average conventional dry disk clutch. Instead of having simply oil between the plates as in "hydromatic drives", a sludgy mixture of oil and iron filings is used. Now, if each of the plates which are near each other, are magnetized by a suitable simple electromagnet, the iron filings supported in their bath of oil will form a rigid—yet flexible—coupling between the plates. In fact as far as the transmission of power is concerned the shafts become as one, yet as far as shocks and the gradual application of power are concerned, it is as if there were a completely flexible rubber link between them.

This difficulty and resultant solution of the connecting of a driven and un-driven shaft together are of great importance. While we ordinarily think of clutches as being used primarily in automobiles, there are many other places where they are of importance. Stationary Diesel engines driving generators are important. Motor connections between machine tools and the work being done on them are important.

While each mechanical improvement of this sort may not seem great, when it is realized that year in and year out these same continual improvements are made, it is easy to understand why and how our machines have reached their present state of efficiency. And the process never ceases. Probably the next great advancements will take place in the development of bearings, on which a great deal of work remains to be done in spite of the wonders of ball and roller bearings.

THE UNTHINKING DESTROYER

by **ROG PHILLIPS**

Gordon and Harold both admitted the possibility of thinking entities other than human. But would they ever recognize the physical form of some of these beings?

"HEY, Gordon!"

Gordon Marlow, Ph.D., straightened up and turned in the direction of the voice, the garden trowel dangling in his dirt-stained white canvas glove. His wide mouth broke into a smile that revealed even white teeth. It was Harold Harper, an undergraduate student, who had called.

"Hop over the fence and come in," Gordon invited.

He dropped the trowel and, taking off his work gloves, reached into his pocket and extracted an old pipe. He filled it, the welcoming smile remaining on his lips, while Harold Harper approached, stepping carefully between the rows of carrots, cabbages, and cauliflower.

Harold held a newspaper in his hand. When he reached Gordon Marlow he held it open and pointed to the headline. **ROBOT ROCKET SHIP TO MARS.**

Gordon took the paper and read the item, puffing slowly and contentedly on his old pipe. His eyes took on an interested look when he came to the reporter's speculations on the possibility of intelligent life on Mars.

Finally he handed the newspaper back to Harold.

"You know, Harold," he said, "I wonder if they would recognize intelligent life if they saw it on other planets."

"Of course they would," Harold replied. "Regardless of its form there would be artifacts that only intelligent life could create."

"Would there?" Gordon snorted. "I wonder."

He squatted down, picking up the trowel and lazily poking it into the rich soil at his feet.

"That's why I wonder," he continued. "We are so prone to set up tests on what intelligent life is that we are likely to miss it entirely if it doesn't conform exactly to our preconceived notions. We assume that if a being is intelligent it must get the urge to build artifacts of some kind—pots and vases, houses, idols, machinery, metal objects. But **MUST** it? In order to do so it must have hands and perhaps legs. Suppose it doesn't have such things? Suppose that no matter how intelligent it might be, it could not do those things!"

"Then it wouldn't be intelligent, would it?" Harold asked, puzzled.

"We are assuming it is," Gordon said patiently. "There are other out-



Harold held a newspaper in his hands.

lets for intelligence than making clay pots. As a last resort for an intelligent being there is always—thinking.”

He chuckled at his joke.

“I’ve often wondered what it would be like to be a thinking, reasoning being with no powers of movement whatsoever. With bodily energy provided automatically by environment, say, and all the days of life with nothing to do but think. What a chance for a philosopher! What depths of thought he might explore. What heights of intellectual perception he might attain. And if there were some means of contact with others of his kind, so that all could pool their thoughts and guide the younger generation, what progress such a race might make!”

“AND so we see,” Ont telepathed, “that there must be a Whole of which each of us is a part only. The old process which says ‘I think, therefore I am,’ has its fallacy in the statement, ‘I think.’ It assumes that that assertion is axiomatic and basic, when in reality it is the conclusion derived from a long process of mental introspection. It is a theory rather than an axiom.”

“But don’t you think, Ont,” Upt replied, “that you are confusing the neumenon with the phenomenon? What I mean is, the fact of thinking is there from the very start or the conclusion couldn’t be reached; and the theoretical conclusion, as you call it, is merely the final recognition of something basic and axiomatic that was there all the time!”

“True,” Ont replied. “But still, to the thinking mind, it is a theory and not an axiom. All neumena are there before we arrive at an understanding of them. Thought, if it exists as such, is also there. But the theoretical conclusion I think has no more degree of cer-

tainty than any other thing the mind can deal with. To say ‘I think’ is to assert the truth of an hypothesis which MAY be true, but not necessarily so. And then to conclude, ‘Therefore I am,’ is to advance one of the most shaky conclusions of all time. Underneath that so-called logical conclusion lies a metaphysics of being, a theory of Wholes, a recognition by differentiation of parts, with a denial of all but the one part set apart by that differentiation, and, in short, the most irrational hodgepodge of contradictory conclusions the thinking mind can conceive. This pre-cognition that enables one to arrive at the tenuous statement, ‘I think, therefore I am,’ is nicely thrown out by tagging it with another metaphysical intangible called illusion—as if the mind can separate illusion from reality by some absolute standard.”

“I believe you’re right, Ont,” Upt replied slowly, his telepathed thoughts subdued with respect. “It is possible that the concept, ‘I think,’ is the illusion, while the so-called illusions are the reality.”

“EVEN without the benefit of past thoughts,” Gordon was saying, whacking off a weed a yard away and nearly upsetting himself, “a mind with nothing to do but think could accomplish miracles. Suppose it was not aware of any other thinking entity, though it might be surrounded by such similar entities. It would be born or come into existence some way, arrive at self awareness and certain other awarenesses to base its thinking on, depending on its structure, and—” he looked up at Harold startled at his own conclusion—“it might even arrive at the ultimate solution to all reality and comprehend the foundations of the Universe!”

“And eventually be destroyed with-

out any other entity having the benefit of it all," Harold commented dryly.

"What a pity that would be," Gordon murmured. "For the human race to struggle for hundreds of years, and have some unguessable entity on Mars do all that in one lifetime—and it all go to waste while some blundering ass lands on Mars and passes it by, looking for artifacts."

"BUT that is only the start in the blunders contained in that most profound philosophical revelation of old," Ont stated. "After arriving at a precarious conclusion about existence the ancients were not satisfied. They had to say, 'If I am I must have been created!' Then they go on and say, 'If I was created there must be a Creator!' And thus they soar from their precarious perch in existence, soar on nonexistent wings, and perch on the essence of evanescence! They do not recognize the alternative—that to exist does not necessarily imply a beginning. They do not recognize it because they have derived all their tools from reality around them and then denied the reality while accepting the validity of the tools of thought derived from it. And in this way they arrive at an absolute existence of Something they have never sensed or felt in any way, while denying all that they have felt and sensed, and give it attributes which their sense of idealism dictates it must have, and call it God."

"Then," Upt said thoughtfully, "I take it you are an atheist?"

"Certainly NOT," Ont growled telepathically.

"But you implied that in your comments on the conclusions of the ancients," Upt insisted.

"BUT if there are no artifacts," Harold said. "And no signs of intel-

ligence whatever, how could we ever know that there WAS intelligence some place?"

"There must be some way," Gordon said. "I've taught logic at the U for fifteen years now, and I've done a lot of thinking on the subject. If we ever reach Mars I think we should be very careful what we touch. We would be clumsy bulls in a china shop, not knowing the true worth of what we found, destroying what might be found to be priceless by later and more careful explorers. Mars is older than the Earth, and I can't help being convinced that there is SOME form of intelligence there."

"I IMPLIED no such thing as atheism," Ont insisted. "I merely said that the reasoning used by the ancients to arrive at the Creator was the most slipshod and illogical possible. There was another line used long ago that was more solid, but still very weak. It started out with the statement, 'I can be aware of nothing but thoughts. External stimuli, if such there are, must be transformed into thought before I can be aware of them. Since I can never be aware of anything other than thought, why assume anything except thought exists? You, and all other things, exist as thoughts in my mind. There is nothing except what exists in my mind. Therefore, by that token, I am God!'"

"But," Upt chuckled, "by the same token I can insist that I am God and you are just a product of my own creation."

"Yes," Ont agreed. "So it presents a dilemma. To resolve it, it is necessary to postulate a Supreme Mind, and to say that all things are just thoughts in God's Mind. That makes us both the same then and there is no argument about who is God!"

HAROLD kicked a lump of moist earth absently

"It seems to me, Gordon," he said cautiously, "that you are biting the air with your teeth. If there are intelligent beings on Mars they will be aware of us, and make themselves known. If for no other reason they will do that to keep us from destroying them."

Gordon stood up and arched his back. He placed the garden trowel and gloves in the hip pocket of his coveralls and tapped his pipe on the heel of his shoe.

"You are assuming," he said, "that such beings can find a way to communicate with us. But have you thought of the possibility that if their abilities to reason are undetectable to us, by the same token they might not be aware we are intelligent? A mad bull in a pasture can think after a fashion, but would you try to reason with him? You would run if he charged you, and if he caught up with you and mauled you it would never occur to you to say, 'Look here, old boy. Let's talk this thing over first.'"

Both men laughed. Gordon started walking along the row he was standing in, toward the house. Harold kept pace.

"I see your point," he agreed.

"There are so many things we assume unconsciously when we speculate on the possibilities of intelligent life on Mars," Gordon went on, stooping over to pull a weed he had missed in his earlier weeding. "Rate of thinking is most probably a function of the material organism. Some other thinking creature might think faster or slower—perhaps so much so that we couldn't follow them even if we could tune in on their thoughts directly. Imagine a mind so ponderous that it takes a year for it to think as much as

we do in a minute! Speed wouldn't necessarily have to be a function of size, either. Something incredibly small might take ages to think a simple thought. Have you ever heard the German tale called *The Three Sleepers*, Harold?"

"No, I haven't," Harold replied.

"WELL, in a small town in Germany there were three men so fat that they could barely walk. They spent nearly all their time sleeping. The only trouble was that every day or so someone would disturb them by singing or walking by, or some other trivial thing that is always happening in a small town, no matter how dead it is.

"One time when they were disturbed three days running they got mad and decided to go to the hills. They looked in the hills until they found a nice dry cave. There they relaxed with deep sighs of contentment and went to sleep. Day after day, week after week, they slept undisturbed.

"Then one day a dog wandered into the cave, saw the three breathing mountains of flesh and heard the din of their deep snoring; and, scared half to death, let out a shrill yip and skeaddled.

"A week later one of the three sleepers stirred, opened his eyes briefly, and muttered, 'What was that noise?' Then he promptly went back to sleep.

"Ten days later the second sleeper stirred, muttered, 'Damfino,' and went back to sleep.

"Nearly a month later the third sleeper opened his eyes suddenly, stared at the roof of the cave for a moment, and said, 'I think it was a dog.' Then he went back to sleep. The way the story goes nothing ever came near the cave again, so they are still there, fast asleep—still fat, too,

I suppose."

"I see what you're driving at," Harold said, chuckling over the story. "We assume that any intelligent being whatever, if it exists, thinks at the same RATE we do; but it might not."

"That's right," Gordon admitted. "And there are even more subtle assumptions we make unconsciously. For one, we assume that a thinking creature must think in the same way we do. We might not even be able to recognize thinking when we meet it, on another planet. No—" he held up his hand to silence the question on Harold's lips, "—I don't know exactly what I mean. I'll put it this way. We have steam engines and gasoline engines. We also have electric motors. Suppose we have steam-engine thought. How would we recognize electric motor thinking?

"Or perhaps a little closer to what I'm trying to express, we have arithmetic and algebra. Suppose with our arithmetic minds with no slightest inkling of the existence of a variable, we run into an algebra mind? We might mistake it for something far removed from thinking or intelligence. We go on the assumption that anything that doesn't stomp up, give a salute, and solemnly announce 'How', is unintelligent."

"It might just be more interested in its own thoughts than in the visitors from Earth," Harold suggested.

"It might," Gordon said. "Or it might be intensely curious and studying the Earthmen very closely with senses other than sight and hearing."

"**B**UT," Ont added thoughtfully, "although the conclusion that we are all thoughts in the mind of the Creator is logically unshakeable, it isn't very satisfying, from a logical point, because it makes God nothing more than the compromising of a cute

dilemma. It places the Creator in the same light as the final decision to locate the Capitol of the United States at Washington."

"Where's that?" Upt asked quickly.

"I don't know," Ont said testily. "That's just something I picked up out of the blue, so to speak. Inspirational thought. For all I know it's just a figment of my imagination."

"I've had inspirational thoughts too," Upt said excitedly. "I haven't spoken of them to you because I was afraid you might think I was becoming disorganized in my thoughts."

"I've done a lot of thinking about the inspirational stuff I get now and then," Ont said matter-of-factly. "If it came all the time I would be inclined to think it was the Voice of the Supreme Being Itself! But it doesn't come that way."

"Neither does mine," Upt said. "I often think there must be angels that hover over us at times and bless us with their wise thoughts, perhaps looking into us to see if we are 'ready' yet. When I seem to sense these powerful thoughts about me I try to feel humble and worshipful. I hope in that way one of them will see fit to reveal himself to me someday."

"They might," Ont said hopefully. "I wouldn't mind actually talking to one of them myself. But speaking of that, we don't know for sure that these inspirational thoughts aren't actually our own. They SEEM different, but that may be because they arise in some part of our deep subconscious thought processes. I've been trying to extend my sense of awareness in order to reach into my subconscious mind and actually plumb it to its depths. One thing I've found is that most of my REAL thinking goes on there, and only rises to the surface of consciousness when it is completed! That lends probability to

the theory that ALL such voices of inspiration are merely my own subconscious mind giving me the end products of carefully thought out trains of reasoning it had dreamed up."

"I think I'll try that line of development myself," Upt said. "I'd never thought of it. Maybe inspiration is only subconscious thought rising to the surface of consciousness. Maybe it is. But if so, I'll be very disappointed. I'd hoped sometime to be able to commune with some intelligence infinitely superior to mine and really learn the true nature of things."

"I SINCERELY hope I'm wrong about it," Ont said. "I too would like to believe that there is more in reality than just us. I wonder if other kinds of entities are possible? I mean thinking beings with different forms, different senses, perhaps different types of thinking. It may be they exist and we aren't equipped to detect them. They may be around us all the time, aware of us and our puerile thoughts, but so superior to us in every way that they don't think it worth while even to consider our feeble cogitations."

"I wouldn't call YOUR cogitations feeble, Ont," Upt exclaimed admiringly.

"That is a point of relativity," Ont said, somewhat flattered. "It does seem in vain, though. We spend our existence in solving the problems of reality, and when we have solved them we have no need of the solution. It gives us a feeling of satisfaction to gain the theoretical basis of reality from our point of view. But I for one would feel much better if we could be of service to some entity who is unable to accomplish that himself, but might be able to comprehend it if we taught him."

"All very noble," Upt said skeptically. "But I can't even imagine a

thinking creature different from us in any way."

"That's why it's so difficult," Ont said. "In our own minds we tend to become absolute rather than relative in our conceptions. Some other entity might, for example, think much more slowly than we, or with incredible rapidity, so that our thoughts would be sluggish to him, or so swift that he would never be able to grasp them until long after we were gone."

"Also, we tend to think that thought as we experience it, is the only possible type of thought. In reality there may be others. Different mental principles. Different material structure. Perhaps concepts outside our ability to grasp, while ours might be outside the ability of such creatures to grasp also."

"I don't believe I grasp what you're trying to say," Upt hesitated.

"Well, put it this way," Ont said patiently. "All things are relative. Why not thought? It might be possible to have two thinking minds which are relatively non-thinking. Each, from EVERY standard of the other, being totally thoughtless and without intelligence or mind."

"Now you're going too far," Upt said. "Thought is thought, I think, and—it's real. If any other entity thinks, its thinking must be real too."

"Of course," Ont murmured. "You miss the point entirely. If from every possible angle, some entity, to YOU, can't think and doesn't, it is non-thinking and unintelligent. Right?"

GORDON and Harold paused at the edge of the garden.

"Nice crop of vegetables you have there, Gordon," Harold said appreciatively.

"Thanks," Gordon said. "Say, wouldn't your wife like some fresh vegetables?"

Without waiting for an answer he stepped back into the garden, taking a knife from his pocket.

"These are nice now," he said, bending over and cutting. "Won't be much longer though. Brown spots developing already. I'll scrape off the brown stuff for you, but tell your wife to cook them right away. In a couple of days they'll spoil."

"UPT!" Ont exclaimed, exasperated.

"Why don't you answer me, Upt? Upt! Where are you, Upt? Why don't you answer?"

"THERE you are," Gordon said, smiling, as he handed Harold the head of cauliflower.

"Thanks," Harold said, accepting the white, fresh head, and balancing it in his palm.

The two men continued up the walk to the house.

"As I was saying," Gordon took up their conversation, "when men get to Mars, if they aren't careful they may destroy a civilization, or even thousands of intelligent beings, without knowing it . . ."

THE END

TUBES? — BAH!

By JUNE LURIE

IT IS generally agreed that the greatest invention of the twentieth century is the vacuum tube. It has done more to change civilization than any single invention including the automobile. It is the unchallenged leader in future developments as well. Its pre-eminence is deserved for it has altered the face of the world.

But a new phenomenon is creeping into the picture. Probably the greatest single use of the vacuum tube is as an amplifier; that is, a device for building up minute currents or voltages to much larger values. In every type of electronic gadget this is its outstanding use.

But recently a number of other ways of amplifying voltages and currents have been discovered—not involving the use of vacuum tubes! The magnetic amplifier is a German and Japanese invention discovered while working during the war with certain magnetic alloys. The prime advantage of these magnetic amplifiers is not that they can do something the vacuum tube cannot, but rather that because they consist of magnets and wires they are incredibly stronger and more rugged than the delicate glass and metal vacuum tubes. During the last war they were applied to German and Japanese aircraft and battleships where shock was a great objectionable factor. At present they are being devoted to industry—particularly of the heavy variety. Up until now one of the drawbacks of the application of electronics to industry has been the delicateness of vacuum tubes. The magnetic amplifiers do away with this objection.

A vacuum tube is classed as a non-linear resistor often for theoretical purposes. So are magnetic

amplifiers. It is likely that in the near future you'll see a great many of these in all sorts of applications.

Another interesting development in the electronic field is the elimination of the conventional bimetallic thermostat which is so useful. The new replacement device is called a "thermistor," a combination of the words resistor and therm—heat.

It has always been known that the resistance of metals and non-metals varies with the temperature. But usually this has been on such a relatively small scale that it has been impracticable to employ a resistor as a heat-sensitive element. But recently materials have been discovered which have huge variable resistances with temperature—both positive and negative. Thus it is possible in place of a thermostat to use a thermistor through which a current is flowing. Change the temperature, the resistance changes, the current changes and the resulting change in current can be used to operate a furnace or another apparatus, or it can be fed to an amplifier.

All through electronics, vacuum tubes are being either simplified or replaced. But this doesn't mean the tube is on the way out. Far from it! As fast as a tube-use is eliminated, another is discovered. For example, consider the new phonograph pick-up. This is a diode vacuum tube, the plate of which is mechanically coupled to a needle through an airtight diaphragm. The needle vibrates, the plate of the tube moves, the current through the tube changes, is fed to an amplifier—presto!—sound is reproduced. Is there no balm in Gilead? Will inventions never cease?

* * *



TEN THOUSAND persons in New York looked skyward at the first rumble of sound. The flash caught them that way, seared them to cinder, liquefied their eyeballs, brought their vitals boiling out of the fissures of their bodies. They were the lucky ones. The rest died slowly, their monument the rubble which had once been a city.

Of all that, Case Damon knew nothing. Rocketing up in the self-service elevator to his new cloud-reaching apartment in San Francisco, his thoughts were all on the girl who would be waiting for him.

"She loves me, she loves me not," he

said to himself. They were orchid petals, not those of daisies, that drifted to the floor of the car.

"She loves me." The last one touched the floor softly, and Case laughed.

Then the doors were opening and he was racing down the hall. No more lonely nights for him, no more hours wasted thumbing through the pages of his little black book wondering which girl to call. Case Damon, rocket-jockey, space-explorer, was now a married man, married to the most beautiful girl in the world.

He scooped Karin off her feet and hugged her to him. Her lips were red



The chute billowed out as he hit the ground, and he pulled hard at the cords to get his footing

BEYOND THE THUNDER

By H. B. Hickey

What was this blinding force that came out of a hole in the sky, and was powerful enough to destroy an entire city? Case thought he knew...

velvet on his, her spun gold hair drifted around his shoulders.

"Box seats for the best show in town, honey," he gloated in her ear.

He fished around in his pockets with one hand while he held her against him with the other. They'd said you couldn't get tickets for that show. But what "they" said never stopped Case Damon, whether it was a matter of theatre tickets, or of opening a new field on a distant airless planet.

"Turn off that telecast," he said. "I'm not interested in Interplan news these days. From now on, Case Damon keeps his feet on terra firma."

And that was the way it was going to be. His interest in the uranium on Trehos alone should keep him and Karin in clover for the rest of their lives. They'd have fun, they'd have kids, they'd live like normal married people. The rest of the universe could go hang.

"If you'd stop raving, I might get a word in edgewise," Karin begged.

"The floor is yours. Also the walls, the building, the whole darned city if you want it," Case laughed.

"That telecast is ticking for you. Washington calling Case Damon. Washington calling Case Damon.

Since you left an hour ago it's been calling you."

"Let it call. It's my constitutional right not to answer."

But his mood was changing to match Karin's. His lean, firm-jawed features were turning serious. Tension tightened his powerful body.

"It must be important, Case," Karin said. "They're using your code call. They wouldn't do that unless it was urgent."

He listened to the tick of the machine. Unless you knew, it sounded only like the regular ticking that told the machine was in operation. But there were little breaks here and there. It *was* for him.

Three long strides took him to the machine. His deft fingers flicked switches, brought a glow to the video tubes.

"Case Damon," he said softly. "Come in, Washington."

It was Cranly's face that filled the screen. But a Cranly Case barely recognized. The man had aged ten years in the last three days. His voice was desperate.

"Good grief, man! Where've you been? Get down here fast. But fast!"

"Listen, Cranly. I'm on my honeymoon. Or have you forgotten? Remember three days ago you were best man at a wedding? Well, the fellow at the altar was Case Damon."

That should have gotten a smile out of Cranly. But it didn't. He was even a little angry now.

"This is an order, Case! I'm giving you the honor of being the first non-official person to know about it. Supreme Emergency Mobilization and Evacuation Order. New York was blasted out of existence an hour ago!"

ALL flights grounded, the skyport in a turmoil, but that little silver card

got him and Karin through. Nobody knew yet what was going on. They were readying for something big, but they didn't know what as yet.

Case hurried Karin to his own hangar, hustled her into the small speeder.

"The fishing cabin on the Columbia, honey. Stay there! And don't worry if you don't hear from me."

He didn't even wait to see her take off. Karin would be safe enough. The cabin was a hundred miles from any possible military objective. All he had to do was sit tight until things were straightened out. New York blasted! That could have been an accident. It *must* have been an accident. The only alternative would be war. And there were no more wars. Somebody at Supreme Council must have lost his head to issue the E.M.E. order.

Sure, that was it. Leave it to the politicians to get excited and jump out of their skins. Below him the glistening towers of Kansas City flashed and faded and were replaced minutes later by the towers of St. Louis. Chicago was batting out a "clear the sky order."

All three of those cities would have been gone by now if there were really a war, Case told himself. But Cranly was no politician. And he wasn't the kind that scared easily.

It was Cranly who met him at Washington skyport. Cranly was scared, all right. He was more frightened than he'd been the time their ship had started to tear loose from their mooring on that moon of Jupiter. His face was gray.

"I'll fill you in as we go," he said. The official car jerked into high speed and Cranly talked. "It was no accident. Get that straight. New York was hit from the outside."

"But how? By what? Under the Unified Council there's no one who'd

have anything to gain by war. There isn't even anyone on Earth with the power to make war."

"That's why we wanted you here. It figures to be an enemy from another planet."

"That doesn't make sense." Case swivelled around to face Cranly. "You and I know our system as well as anyone alive. Cut out the guessing and give me the facts."

"All right. Enough people saw the thing from Jersey so that we know what happened. They say there was a rumble like thunder. Out of a clear sky, mind you. Then—get this—the sky seemed to open! There was a blast of light. That's all. New York was gone."

"Atom blast?"

"Hardly. No mushroom cloud. Accident? No, and you'll learn why I'm so sure shortly."

CASE DAMON had met some of these men before. A few others he recognized from their pictures. The Supreme Council. They were plenty worried. Strogoff was chewing his mustache; Vargas drummed nervously with thick fingers. Cunningham and Osborn were pacing the floor.

"Thank heaven for one thing," Osborn said. Vargas looked up at him quickly, his dark eyes slits in his swarthy face.

"For what?" Vargas asked bitterly.

"That there has been no panic. Urban evacuations are proceeding quietly."

"I still think it could have been some natural phenomenon," Case interrupted. "Even a terrific bolt of lightning."

Cranly's big shoulders lifted as a recorder was wheeled into the room. He indicated where the machine was to be set down.

"We've wasted a little time in letting you make these guesses," he told Case. "All for a reason. We want you to realize fully what sort of weapon we are up against. Now listen to this message that was beamed onto the Council's private line a few minutes after the blast."

He went to the recorder and tripped a lever. The instrument settled to a low whine that soon disappeared as the recording tape entered the converter. The voice might have been in the room with them.

"To the Supreme Council of the Planet Earth: What happened to New York was only a token of what can be done to your entire planet. Our terms are complete and unconditional surrender, to be telecast within one week. To hasten your decision, there will be other tokens at twelve-hour intervals."

"Now you know," Cranly said heavily. "Either give up or be destroyed. And that ultimatum from an enemy which has no compunction about murdering ten million people to prove its power."

A thousand questions jumped to Case Damon's mind. The horror of the thing stilled most of them. He checked over possibilities quickly.

"You say many people outside of New York saw the flash. What about skyports, observatories, the fleet base on the Moon? Did they try to get a triangulation?"

"I can see why Cranly wanted you here," Vargas said, smiling faintly. His own people had been the last to join the Unified Council. He had held out to the last, had demanded and received concessions, but he was considered one of the Council's ablest men.

"Naturally there were attempts at fixing the source of the flash," he continued. "Had those attempts met with success the fleet would already be on

its way."

"I don't get it," Case said bluntly. "If they attempted triangulation, they must have got it."

"Precisely," Cranly interjected. "They got it. The source of the flash was an *empty space* between Mars and Venus!"

CASE was rocked back on his heels by Cranly's disclosure. This was *something*. An enemy who loosed his blasts out of unoccupied space, who could cut into the Council's own line at will!

"What about a fast moving asteroid? That could have been gone before it was observed."

"Not a chance," Cranly said.

And Cranly should know. So should the rest. Every one of them was in charge of a department of the Earth's services. But there was that emphasis on Mars and Venus. Strogoff interrupted that line of thought.

"I say we might as well give in." Even his thick mustache drooped in despondency. "Why have millions more killed?"

"Never!" Osborn thundered.

"I should hesitate to admit defeat," Vargas shrugged. "But how can we defend ourselves?"

Outside the chambers, in the corridor, Cranly gripped his friend's shoulder hard. "That's been going on for an hour," he said, "this one for, and that one against."

"And meanwhile the fleet can't do a thing," Cranly added.

"Exactly. Whoever blasted New York is doing it from an invisible base. That's my guess. It's an invader from space. My job will be to stay here and keep the Council from giving up. Your job is to find the base."

"Are you sure the attack was from space?"

"Positive."

"Well," Case mused, "I've found uncharted planets, even discovered a city on Mars that the experts said didn't exist. Maybe I can get beyond the thunder, through a hole in the sky."

IT WAS night, and that was a good break. Cranly had been sure he could hold the Council together another twelve hours. Even through a second attack. Fine. For a job like this, Case thought, twelve hours of night were better than twenty of daylight.

He grabbed an aero-cab for the sky-port. The pilot looked twice at the silver tab, finally nodded. Case had a few minutes with his thoughts. He'd wanted to talk to Karin, but Cranly had turned thumbs down.

"You can talk to her if and when you get back," he'd said. Fine stuff for a guy who was supposed to be enjoying a honeymoon.

"Hey!" the pilot blurted, cutting into Case's thoughts. He pointed out the window.

Case saw a red streak cut through the sky toward them. A rocket ship, and moving fast. It flashed closer. No mistake about this, it was aiming right for them. They were a couple of dead ducks.

"Look out," Case said.

His big hands flung the pilot out of his seat. Case took over the controls. A whoosh of fire swept past the cabin, missed them as Case sent the ship into a dive.

"Break out the glider chutes," he called back over his shoulder.

Luckily, the pilot didn't try to argue. He was too scared. He snapped a chute around his own shoulders, fought his way forward and got the other one around Case. Another blast cut past the cabin, then another. The rocket ship was using all guns now. They were

over the Potomac, then over a wooded area.

"We'll jump at a hundred feet," Case yelled.

A streak of flame caught the cab's right edge, and Case told himself they'd be lucky to jump at all. The little craft was almost out of control. His pretended spin was turning into the real thing. Keeping his eyes glued on the plummeting altimeter, he got his left foot up and kicked out the side window. A flash melted the dial and singed his sleeve. One-fifty.

"Go!" Case barked.

The pilot's heels vanished out the window and Case banked sharply to the right and flung himself out of the seat. Hard earth of a clearing looked like it was going to smack him right in the face.

Then the small chute billowed and pulled out glider wings. Case pulled cords and dropped leftward. The cab hit the ground to his right, the rocket ship on its tail for a final blast. He saw that, and then got his hands in front of him and hit the ground in a rolling fall.

THE pilot was a still shape near him in the gloom. Case got out of the chute and ran to him, slid expert hands over the man, and felt the messy pulp that had once been a face. The pilot hadn't known how to fall properly.

Case took a quick look upward. His trick hadn't worked. The rocket was making a tight curve for a landing. Smart operators; they weren't taking any chances. Case cursed them, whoever they were, even as he dug his silver identification plate out of his pocket and slid it into the dead pilot's flying jacket.

Then he ran. Maybe he'd fool them. Maybe he wouldn't. They'd probably take a few minutes to think it over.

He skipped around a bush and heard voices and the pound of running feet behind him.

SO CRANLY was wrong. This wasn't strictly a space job. There was a tie-up on Earth, and the tie-up had to be on the very inside of the Supreme Council! Nobody else knew Case Damon was in on this deal. He ought to head back and warn Cranly.

No, that wasn't right. He had to trust Cranly to handle his end. Only nine hours now till the next blast, and if he took time out to reach Cranly he wouldn't ever make it. Besides, his stunt might have worked. Why tip them off he was still alive?

Brilliant headlights came up the road and Case stepped out onto the highway. The lights came on at two hundred miles an hour, caught him and made him blink. Then there was the hiss of automatic brakes.

"Hey!" a man yelled "What if those brakes hadn't worked?"

Case jerked the car door open and saw that the man was alone. A young fellow, and plenty frightened at sight of Case's torn clothes and scratched and dirty face.

"Don't take your hands off that wheel," Case said sharply. "Head for Washington skyport and keep your foot on the floor all the way."

The young fellow's hand fell away from the dash compartment. He gulped, nodded, and threw the car into gear. He got his foot all the way down and kept it there. They took a sweeping curve at full speed.

Washington was a dot of light, then a haze, a glare. All departments working overtime tonight, Case thought. They hurtled toward the city, smack toward Pennsylvania Avenue.

"Slow down," Case said. "I don't want to be picked up."

THE young fellow slowed down. He must be thinking he's got a desperate character next to him, Case mused. If he only knew how desperate! The skyport was less than a mile away now.

"Take the side road around to where the hangars are," Case directed.

The young fellow took the side road. They swept past the main gate, along the ten-mile fence, slid without lights now behind the row of hangars. The hangars looked like rows of cigars standing on end, the ships inside them pointing up and ready to go.

"This is where we get out," Case said. He shoved the driver out of the door and followed him. His fist came up in a short arc and cracked against a jawbone.

"Sorry," Case told the inert figure. "I just can't take any chances."

He dumped the unconscious man beside the road and then went back to the car. Wheeling it around so it pointed back toward the main gate, he left the motor whirring and stepped out. One hand depressed the accelerator button, the other held the motor release.

When he jumped clear, the car spurted. With lights off in the darkness the automatic brake wouldn't work. A hundred yards down the car slowed, swerved, hit a concrete abutment. Quite a crash, Case thought. That ought to turn a few heads the wrong way for a while.

He was at the high fence in a flash. His fingers searched for and found crevices. Those fingers were strong as steel. They hauled Case Damon upward and over the top. He grinned into the darkness.

Men were running from the hangars toward the site of the crash. With no incoming traffic slated, the control tower had swung all lights that way. Somewhere a crash siren sang its song.

Case dropped completely relaxed. His feet hit first as he fell forward. His hands hit next, then his head was down between his shoulders and he was rolling forward onto the back of his neck and then onto his feet again. He came up running.

IT WAS going to be a slow start without rocket-boosters. But rockets made light and sound. This had to be a silent takeoff.

He knew his way around this tiny ship even in complete blackness. He had designed it himself, and it was completely functional. Case Damon had wanted no comforts; those came at the end of a journey. When there was a race for a newly discovered ore field, it was the man who got there first, not most comfortably, who won out.

A sharp click told Case that the anti-grav was on. He was looking through his forward visalloy plate straight up into a starlit sky. That wasn't too good. Small as the ship was, it still would make a dark blot.

His eyes roved, discovered a few wisps of cloud. He prayed them closer. Now!

This wasn't the first time he'd taken off in darkness, depending on spring power to lift him silently out of the hangar cradle. He'd beaten them all to Threnos only because they'd figured to catch his takeoff by the rocket flashes. They'd figured to tail him that way, too, only by the time the competition had found out he was gone, he'd been half way there.

Cranly hadn't called him in on this without good reason. Together, he and Cranly had made many a rocket jaunt to distant and dangerous places. They'd been a good team before Cranly had sought election to the Council. Cranly was the cautious kind; but when he knew exactly where he stood, he could

move fast enough.

Case slid the ship behind a cloud and felt his speed slacken. He had to risk a short burst of the jets. The odds were against anyone seeing the flash now.

At his present low speed, it would be a while before he was out of range of detection apparatus. He had time to wonder whether he ought to buzz Karin on the telecast. Better not; there was always the chance his call might be picked up.

He was sorry now that he hadn't thought to shoot cross-country to get Karin. Who knew for certain where the next blast would hit? He could have dropped her off at the moon base.

The moon was full in his vision plates now. He was close enough to tune in their local telecast to the moon colonies. The machine was ticking away and Case switched it onto the pitted satellite's local beam.

They had the news all right, and they were making preparations for an attack. The fleet base was assuring all colonists that it would furnish them all possible protection.

A fat lot of good that was going to do! Case had had enough time now to think this over, and he was beginning to see the ramifications of the thing.

Someone on Earth, someone *inside the Council*, wanted to take over. But with Earth supervision of military manufacture so thorough, he hadn't a chance to get started. So he must have enlisted the aid of some power from outer space.

But how? And what power? And who was the traitor inside the Council?

Case wasn't going at this blindly. That first question, for instance. There had been in the last year several strange disappearances. Two space liners from Mars to Venus had utterly vanished, without a trace. Smaller ships, too, had

never reported back. They had last been heard from in that same area.

But space liners just didn't vanish. They had equipment for any emergency, were able to contact Earth at a moment's notice.

A hole in the sky, observers of the flash had said. Between Mars and Venus, Cranly had told him. It was beginning to add up. It was Case Damon's job to figure the total.

NOW the moon was far behind. Case looked at his watch and saw that he was making real time. Another couple of hours was all he'd need.

He got out the chart Cranly had given him, set it up alongside his own navigation map, figured the time element and aimed his ship at a blankness in space. He would hit that empty space at exactly the right time.

After that? Case didn't know. But he wasn't the kind to cross bridges before he got to them.

What if Cranly was the traitor within the Council? That was hard to believe, but you could never tell what lust for power might do to a man. Cranly wasn't the type. Yet, there was a planet to be won. They said every man had his price. And Cranly was in charge of Earth's intelligence services.

The ticking of the telecast broke into his thoughts. There were breaks in the steady sounds. His code call.

Case switched on the video and got a blank. What the devil! Automatically he reached for his transmitter switch. And caught himself in the nick of time. It might be a trick to get him to reveal his position. Instead, he turned up the audio.

"Damon," a voice said. "Case Damon." It was not the same voice he had heard in the Council chambers. This was vaguely familiar, but definitely disguised.

"Better turn back, Damon," the voice said. "You almost tricked us. Don't let a small success go to your head. We cannot be defeated. Why sacrifice your life for a lost cause?"

"You know where you can go, brother," Case said aloud.

It had been bad psychology to use on a man who had never feared death anyway. Besides, if they were so omniscient, why bother to try to stop him with words?

The voice had tried to impress him with power. It had only succeeded in disclosing a weakness. They didn't know where Case Damon was, and they were worried.

HOURS had become minutes, and the minutes were ticking away with the sweep of the hand on Case's watch. Ten minutes more to go. Using Cranly's figures and chart, he was only a thousand miles from that point in space.

He swung the ship around and cut speed, but held his hand ready at the throttle. There might not be much time to act. And the telecast was using his signal again. He didn't want to turn it up, but he wanted to hear that voice again.

"Damon," the voice said. "Case Damon. This is your last chance."

"Change your tune," Case snarled at the instrument.

But the voice was going on. "If your own life means nothing, perhaps you value another more. Turn on your video and you will see something of interest to you."

That got him, brought him bolt upright in his seat. The voice could mean only one thing—Karin! Somehow they had got to her!

Maybe this was a trick. Only five minutes or less now. They might be trying to distract him. But he couldn't

take the chance. With fingers that were icy cold, Case Damon flicked on the video.

A wall was what he first saw. Only a wall. It was a trick. But wait. That wall was familiar, rough, unpainted. The focus was shifting to a section that showed a mounted fish. Now down the wall and across to a familiar couch. The fishing cabin!

"Karin!" Case blurted.

Then he was mouthing incoherent curses. Her figure had been flung across the screen, on the couch. She had put up a fight. Her face was scratched, her blouse ripped. There was a gag in her mouth and her hands were tied behind her.

"She dies unless you turn back!" the voice said. It meant every word.

Karin had guts. She was shaking her head, imploring him with her eyes not to turn back.

If he only had time to think! What did the rest of the world mean to Case Damon? Nothing, if it was a world without Karin. Yet, she was his own kind, this girl he had married. Were their positions reversed, it would have been Case who shook his head. Better to die than live in a world dominated by a murderous, merciless power.

And yet, she was . . . Karin. Without her there was nothing. Already Case's hands were busy, throwing switches that would cut in the retarding jets, swinging the responsive craft about. He had to give in. He didn't have time to think.

"All right," he started to say.

HIS right hand reached out to turn on his transmitter. His lips framed the words again. But it was too late!

The video was distorting into a mass of wavy lines, the audio brought nothing but a jumble of sound. Interference was scrambling the telecast waves

beyond hope of intelligibility. He couldn't get through. The first rumble rose to audibility and made the ship shiver.

"Too late," Case said, and was beyond cursing.

Too late to turn back now. But not too late to go ahead. Air waves were pitching the ship like a cork. He fought to control, and finally swung back on course.

Case took a last quick look at Cranly's chart, and flicked his eyes ahead to the vision plate. Only blackness yet, but the sound was growing and rising in pitch past the point where he could hear it. There was the sense of enormous strain, of the tug of unbelievably powerful and overwhelming contending forces.

And then the blackness split!

First, he could see only a pinpoint of light. It grew larger, widened, spread until it became a cleft in the void. Case flung his ship forward.

The last rumble of thunder was fading. He kept his eyes on that cleft in space, knowing what would come. Yet, when it came, he was almost blinded. A blast of light, a light so intense that it was a tangible, solid thing, roared through the cleft and hurtled Earthward.

Then the bolt was gone and the cleft was closing. The tug of forces was growing less. He had just seconds left to reach that diminishing crack in the blackness.

Like a streak of vengeance itself, Case sent his ship across the void. His lips moved in silent prayer. There were only seconds now. The crack was growing smaller, and that meant his speed was not great enough. To risk more power might blow the ship apart. But he had to get through. He must, he must . . .

He was through!

CASE was through, through the cleft and beyond the thunder. He was hurtling out of blackness into a world of light. Frantically, he cut down his speed, not knowing whether he was going into open space or the side of a mountain, whether in this new world he would be going up or down.

His altimeter had switched on automatically. That was a relief. A quick glance showed the dial at 90,000 feet. The retarding jets were slowing his drop, and Case had time for a look at strange terrain below.

From his present height, it looked like rolling country. There were hills, valleys, a checkerboard of green and tan that might be cultivated ground, a river.

But most important of all, there was a city, a city of towers and pinnacles more impressive than any on Earth. Three of those towers interested Case. They stood apart, the center tower hundreds of feet higher than the two which flanked it, and all three were like fingers pointing directly at the place where the cleft had been.

Case made decisions rapidly. He had to get the ship out of the air before someone saw it. First, though, he'd have to make sure it would be air he stepped into when he got out. He had a space suit in the forward locker, but putting that on would slow him up.

An intake valve hissed away. Soon, there would be something to test. Then the hissing stopped. That was a good sign. Pressure outside the ship was almost the same as inside. There was an atmosphere.

But of what was that atmosphere composed? That was now the big question. Case set the controls and turned to the intake tank. With the turn of a petcock, there came another hiss. Case got out his cigarette lighter and flicked it into flame.

He held his breath as the flame wavered. The air in the ship was being forced away from it. But the flame did not die. Case sighed with relief. If the atmosphere supported combustion, it would support breathing.

With that important question answered, Case turned to others. Where the devil was he? He couldn't answer that, but perhaps he might discover a clue. The telecast was one way.

But the telecast had stopped ticking. Case ran the thing over the entire frequency range and got nothing. If that was a clue, it was a negative one.

He had to think it over even as he swung the ship into a long glide for a hill which looked like it might have a good deal of growth on it. Coming in low, Case saw that vegetation was sparse. But there was not another ship in these strange skies. He had to land soon.

Running his eyes over the landscape below, Case discovered tall vegetation along the base of another hill. It would have to do. He came in low over the green, and swooped in for a landing. Luckily, this ship could land on a handkerchief.

STRANGE trees, these which encircled the tiny clearing. They were all shades of green, taller and broader than sequoias, and yet more like ferns in the delicacy of their gigantic fronds.

Case stepped through the forward hatch into a warm, humid atmosphere that was quite comfortable. He had thought of waiting for darkness, but there was no way of knowing whether darkness ever came to this strange world which seemed to exist in nowhere.

Too bad his compass was no good here. There seemed to be no magnetic polarity. He'd have to trust to his sense of direction.

The city Case had seen was at least fifty miles away and past a couple of low-lying hills that hid it from sight. That made it a good hike, even for Case Damon's long and muscular legs.

And after he got there, if he got there? Case shrugged. Another bridge to be crossed later. He hitched at his holstered gun and started moving through the ferns.

He'd have to be careful; on closer scrutiny from a low level the land had proved to be cultivated. And that meant people about.

A humming drew his eyes skyward. Huge ships of weird design were crisscrossing the air above, obviously looking for something. Probably himself, Case thought grimly. They must have cleared the air for that blast. Now they're out in force. Still, there was a chance they'd thought him one of their own pilots who'd disobeyed. He'd come in too fast for anyone to have had a good look at his ship, he hoped.

He jumped five feet at an ear-splitting roar, whipped out his gun and had the stud under his fingertip for a quick blast. He felt foolish when the source of the roar turned out to be a purple bird that soared up out of the foliage overhead.

There were other sounds now, from small animals that scooted about on six legs and looked like fur-bearing armadillos. Then the ferns were behind him, and he was out onto a road that came over the hill.

Case got off the road in a hurry. Well tended fields lay on either side of it with spaced rows of grain that was taller than he. He could walk between the rows and be out of sight of the road.

He took a few quick steps, pushed aside a stalk of grain, and tripped. His gasp was involuntary but loud. For

a second he lay still, then got to his feet. He had tripped over a root.

"Natsa!" a voice shouted. There was the thump of heavy feet behind him.

CASE whirled. Just in time. A big orange-skinned man in a metallic suit came bursting out of the next row of grain. He took one look at Case, and reached for the holstered weapon at his side.

But few men could outdraw and outshoot Case Damon. A flash of green played about his opponent's head. And there was no head.

"Natsa to you," Case grunted at the body.

He was used to death in many forms, and it upset him not at all to handle the body. The fellow had been about his own size. At least he would now have a suit that wouldn't attract attention. He decided to keep his own gun rather than trust a strange one, but he exchanged holsters with the corpse.

"Now, if only Natsa doesn't show up, I'll make tracks out of here," Case said to himself.

But the Damon luck was wearing thin. There were shouts from along the road. More than one voice now, and all using a strange language. They must have come over from the field across the way, Case thought.

He flattened himself against the last row of stalks and took a deep breath. With the first sight of somebody coming through the row of grain, he stepped out and onto the road.

There were three of them, all big men, and none were looking his way. By the time their cries of consternation rose at sight of the body, Case was across the road and into the grain on the other side.

He ran until his heart began to hammer, and then he slowed to a fast

walk. When the field curved around a bend, he breathed easier.

Along the road there was activity now, and the sound of vehicles moving fast. They were looking for him. Then the field ended, and Case was in a grove of wild fruit. Heavy brush caught at his face, but he stuck close to the road.

Voices drifted in toward him. He had to chance a look. Stretching himself full length, Case parted thick brambles and peered out. More men, all wearing the same metallic suits. This group was walking slowly, munching on the same sort of fruit that grew overhead.

Case thought it over. He didn't have a chance. His own tanned skin would stand out like a sore thumb against the orange brightness of these people.

But he was not without resources. The fruit had given him an idea. It dripped an orange liquid. If the stuff was good enough to eat, it certainly couldn't hurt to smear a little over his face and hands!

WHEN he hit the road again, Case Damon was as orange as any man he'd so far seen in this new world. Maybe he wouldn't get away with it, but he had to try.

Vehicles sped by and nobody gave him a second glance. So far, so good. When he passed the group he had seen from the grove without drawing undue attention, he relaxed.

A long row of chugging trucks rumbled by, apparently loaded with produce for the city. Case looked up and a man on the back of the last one waved and shouted to him. Case waved back and the truck slowed.

He wished now that he hadn't waved. The truck had stopped, and the man in back was waiting to give him a hand up. Too late to back down now. Case

took a short run and swung aboard and the truck moved on. The man who'd helped him up said something.

"Hmmm?" Case hummed. If this fellow made a suspicious move he'd have to slug him.

"Kanato?" the man said. It was a question. They came over the brow of a small hill and the man pointed to the city in the distance. He was asking if Case was bound for the city.

Case bobbed his head. He was going to play dumb. He pointed at his mouth and shook his head. His companion nodded understandingly, but wanted to get chummy anyway. Then he looked down and saw Case's holster and changed his mind.

Small cars of a strange sort were buzzing past them, going away from the city. They were filled with orange-skinned men carrying shoulder arms. Probably Kanato police on their way to investigate a very recent killing. Case gave silent thanks he had got this ride.

There was a tense moment at the gate of the city. Heavily armed men swarmed about. But produce trucks seemed to be exempt from close scrutiny.

Case's companion traded jeers and coarse laughter with the gendarmerie, and the truck rolled on down a wide avenue. The old feud between city dweller and rustic, Case guessed. He noticed that the citizens of Kanato wore clothing of high lustre and fine mesh.

They must be a scrappy people. Almost every male citizen carried a gun. His own wouldn't be noticed, then.

Before a huge building, the truck stopped. The end of the journey. Case hopped off, nodded his thanks for the lift and started walking.

THOSE three towers were at the edge of the city. Case made his way through a crowded square, turned down

a fern-lined street and headed for them. From behind him a light breeze came, wafting a familiar aroma to his nostrils.

Cigarette smoke! But until now he had seen nobody smoking. Acting on impulse, Case drifted over to one side of the walk and bent as though to tie his shoe.

Men walked past. Case straightened up, got a look at the backs of their necks, and gasped. White—as white as his own skin. These were no inhabitants of this world, but men of his own kind!

There were three of them. And now, as they finished lighting up, they were talking plain Earth English with as little concern as though they were strolling down the street of any Earth city.

"By the time we get back, there ought to be news," one of the men said.

"Yeah. That last one should have brought them around."

The second voice was another surprise. It stirred memories. Somewhere, Case had heard that coarse tone before. He thought hard.

Sure, now he had it. Pete Engels, hot-shot engineer cashiered out of the space fleet and turned adventurer bum. The other two men Case didn't know.

"I'd give plenty for a look at Davisson's face now," Engels was saying. Davisson was commander of the moon base, to which Engels had been attached.

"He's probably running around in circles," one of Engels' companions laughed.

"Yeah. And don't think he ain't number one on my list when we take over."

A sudden humming filled the air as they drew closer to the three towers, and Case stopped listening to the conversation for a moment. The man ahead had paused briefly, but they were now moving on.

Pedestrian traffic had fallen off, Case noticed. He and the three ahead

were the only ones heading for the towers. It looked like the towers were out of bounds for most citizens. A moment later he was certain of that, when he saw the number of armed guards around the entrance gate.

But the guards didn't stop Engels and the pair with him. They jerked their heads in a brief greeting and walked right through the cordon. Case paused, let them get inside the building.

HERE goes, he thought. Nothing like a bold front in a spot like this. He stepped forward briskly.

But the bold front wasn't working. Hostile eyes swung his way. Fingers came down to rest on triggers that could send death winging.

Case looked up, pretended to be startled. A foolish grin spread over his face. Would they believe he'd been day-dreaming? They would. He was turning around and walking back the way he'd come and nobody was stopping him.

He cursed under his breath. Somehow he had to get inside that tower Pete Engels had entered. But how?

An inviting doorway yawned back along the avenue, and Case stepped inside. He looked at his watch. A few hours left until the next blast. He'd have to move fast.

Fighting his way into the tower was absolutely out of the question. He'd never get past the guards. Maybe not, but he was sure going to try. This time the grin on his face was far from foolish.

Case Damon had an idea, and he wasn't one to let time slip by before he acted on it. The idea was simple, so simple it might even work.

An orange dye had gotten him into Kanato. But it would never get him into that tower. Yet, Pete Engels and

his pals had walked right in. Maybe that was one place where an Earth complexion would turn the trick.

Case got out his handkerchief, spit on it a few times and started rubbing. It was slow work, but he'd better not leave any telltale streaks.

When he came out of the doorway a few minutes later, he had left behind him a handkerchief and as much of the dye as he could remove. Lucky he'd always been an outdoor man. Whatever was left would be too faint to show against his tan skin.

His walk was not too slow, not too fast. His step was the step of a man who knew he wasn't going to have any trouble. The guards looked up and saw him coming.

Case kept his head down as though in deep thought. They could see his color, but not his face. His right hand swung close to his holster. Now a booted foot came into his line of vision.

The foot moved toward him. Case bobbed his head up and down briefly, much as Engels had done, and kept walking. The guard hesitated, stepped out of his way. He was through the cordon and going up through the entrance.

Then the yelling came from behind him. They had caught on.

ONE leap took Case through the doorway. Over his head, a pellet burst. They were shooting now. Somewhere in the building, a warning whistle cut loose.

He ran down a long corridor, saw figures pop out of a room ahead. But there was a corridor running crossways. Case skidded, made a fast turn and pounded along that one. Plenty of shouting now. It sounded like he had an army after him.

These halls were too long. He was a dead pigeon if he didn't find a place

to hide soon. There were plenty of doors, but he didn't know which one to try. Then a series of the deadly pellets broke around him and made up his mind. The next door was the one.

It opened into a big room filled with electrical equipment. Case barged around something that looked like a big transformer, and headed for a door at the other end. The door swung toward him, disclosing a mass of men.

His gun was in his hand now and spitting death. But there were too many. Their corpses blocked the doorway. He couldn't get around them.

Something heavy cracked against the base of his skull and knocked him to his knees. Half dazed, he turned and tried to fire and was buried beneath an avalanche of charging men. The gun was knocked out of his hand.

"Hey!" A startled voice came through the roaring in Case Damon's ears. "Hey! This guy is white!"

Rough hands twisted his arms behind Case and other hands hauled him to his feet. He shook his head to clear it and found himself facing Pete Engels. There was instant recognition.

"Case Damon. Well, I'll be! I told Yuna to warn those guards, but I didn't really think you'd make it."

"I didn't, did I?" Case said bitterly.

"What is it?" A voice said from behind Engels. "What is going on?"

That was in Earth English, but with a heavy accent. The voice belonged to an orange skinned man who came through as the guards parted. This was someone of importance, Case realized. His metallic suit gleamed with the lustre of spun gold, and it filled his big body as though it had been moulded to it.

"Meet Case Damon," Engels said with mock ceremony. "Damon, this is Yuna, ruler of Kanato and soon to be half ruler of the Earth."

Haughty yellow eyes flashed at Engels and stilled his tongue. Then the eyes swung back to Case and gave him a thorough scrutiny.

"So this is the one of whom we were warned," Yuna said. "I can see why the Earthlings do not surrender so quickly."

"They'll surrender all right," Engels snarled.

Case saw an opening and lashed out with his foot. The kick caught Engels low in the belly and drew a yell of pain. A fist thudded against Case's jaw.

"You rat," Case said through drawn lips. "You'd sell out your own mother."

"For the right price," Engels admitted, cheerfully. He turned to Yuna. "What'll we do with him?"

"Put him with the rest. We can dispose of them later."

AS A CELL it was not too bad. But there was a stench that was nauseating. Case adjusted his eyes to the gloom and looked about.

There were bunks along one wall, a few of them occupied. With the shutting of the door behind Case, men stirred. Two thin legs swung over the top of a bunk, followed by an equally thin body.

"Take your gloating elsewhere, Engels," a sharp voice said.

"The name is not Engels. It's Case Damon."

"Huh?"

There were more legs now, four pairs. Men were spluttering excitedly. Thin bodies slid out of bunks and feet came toward Case. There was one man he knew, Burnine, the pilot of the Mars-Venus liner which had vanished.

"Case Damon! I knew sooner or later someone would get through."

"Don't let your hopes run away with you," Case said. "I'm the only one,

and it looks like I'll be the last."

Burnine was crying, definitely and without shame. He fought to bring himself under control.

"They're going to get away with it," he said, brokenly. Long imprisonment had broken him down.

"Maybe," Case said. "It all depends on what the chances are of getting out of this cell before the next blast. The Council hasn't given up yet."

"I know. But that humming means they're building up voltage for the next shot. It won't be long."

"How do you know?"

"Engels. He comes down here every couple of days to tell us we're chumps for not coming over to his side. Meanwhile, we've learned what goes on. In a year you can learn a lot if you keep your ears open."

"A year," Case mused. "Since those liners disappeared."

"Yeah. Engels and his pals were on the one I was piloting. They stuck guns in our ribs and took over and brought us here."

"There are a couple of things I've got to know," Case said. "First, what kind of weapon are they using? Second, where are we?"

"I can't quite answer the first. And I don't know exactly where we are, but I know how we got here. Maybe that will help.

"It seems that someone on Earth was experimenting with a new force. He discovered that he could put a crack in the curvature of space. Once he got through that crack and found Yuna, he realized that with this weapon of Yuna's he could take over the Earth. I don't know who this person is, but Engels is working for him. So are a lot of other people."

"What about these towers?"

"They work automatically. Two of them contain the apparatus for build-

ing up energy. The blast is fired from this one. It's all timed to fit with the machine on Earth. That's why it takes exactly twelve hours."

"Do you know where the main works are?"

"On the level below this one. But what's the difference? We'll never get out of here."

"Maybe not. But we can sure try. Are you game?"

Burnine stared at him, looked around at the other three. Their thin shoulders had lost some of the sag. A spark had been kindled in their eyes.

"What can we lose?" Burnine said.

THEY could tell when Engels started down the corridor outside their cell. His feet made a heavy sound. There were several guards with him.

"What do you guys want?" Engels shouted through the door.

"I've got a message for your boss," Case shouted back.

"Go ahead. I can hear you."

"It's in writing," Case called.

Engels laughed sourly. "This better not be a trick. You're a dead tomato if it is. Back away from the door."

He came through, closely followed by four guards. All of them carried guns in their hands, but when they saw Case in the middle of the room with the men behind him, they put up the weapons and moved forward.

"Where is it?" Engels asked.

"Here." Case put his hand out and Engels reached.

Too late, Engels and the guards realized that there were only three men behind Case. From behind the open door, Burnine's frail body hurtled and crashed into the guards, knocking them off balance.

Engels was thrown forward, his chin meeting Case's fist on its way upward.

There was the crack of a neck breaking. Case had put all his strength into that punch.

Burnine kicked at a guard's head, dropped down to one knee and came up with a gun. The other guards didn't have a chance. Burnine peppered them with pellets that ate away flesh wherever they hit.

"Let's go," Case snapped. "You take the lead. And don't stop to argue if anyone gets in our way."

Then they were racing down the long corridor toward a heavy door at the end. A pair of guards looked up and saw them coming and died before their hands could reach their guns. Case paused to pick up a heavy weapon that leaned against a wall.

Another guard stuck his head out of a side room and popped it back in. Within a second, warning whistles pierced the air. But over the whistles Case could still hear a hum.

"Not much time," Burnine panted. He was completely winded.

A stairway made a dark opening and they plunged downward through it. The sound of motors pounded up toward them. They were in darkness for long minutes. And then the darkness gave way to light and they were racing into a vast chamber filled with scurrying men.

Case brought up the heavy gun he was carrying, triggered it and was gratified by the streak of flame that issued from the muzzle. But other guns were popping steadily. Behind Case, a man went down.

There was a sharpshooter behind a bank of instruments, and Case took steady aim. The sharpshooter dropped. Meanwhile, Burnine and the other two had not been idle. They had both flanks cleared.

"This is it," Burnine gasped. "Good thing Engels liked to brag. That big

panel is the converter."

He reached out a bony hand for a maze of wires, but Case stopped him.

"Wait. We don't want to do just a temporary job. And we don't want to die here either. There's a debt I've got to settle on Earth. What are our chances of getting a ship?"

"Not much," Burnine told him. "The liner we came in is in a hangar beyond the last tower."

"Close enough," Case snapped. "You four watch the doors. They've got a tank of atomic fuel here, and if I know my stuff I ought to be able to rig up something that will do a permanent job on this installation."

ONLY two of them came up out of the lower level—Burnine and Case Damon. Behind them, they left a pile of corpses. Burnine was kept going by sheer strength of will, lugging a shoulder gun that weighed half as much as he.

The corridor on the main level was packed with armed men, but they cleared it by keeping a blast of fire always before them. Men melted away into side rooms, slid down intersecting halls. But at the entrance, the big door was closed.

"Looks like we're stuck," Burnine grunted. "We can't burn our way through that. And if we move, we'll have a hundred men popping out again behind our backs."

"We'll try one of these rooms back here," Case said. "Always the chance of it having a window."

The first room they tried was a blank. So were the next couple. While Case kept the corridor cleared, Burnine stuck his head inside and investigated.

"This one," he said at his fourth try. "Bars on the window, but maybe we can burn them off. Looks like a council room."

They darted inside, slammed the door behind them. Outside there was the pounding of many feet. While Burnine watched the door, Case turned his fire on the barred windows.

One of the bars turned red, glowed bright and started to melt. But it was going to be a long job. And they hadn't much time now. Case snatched a quick look at his watch and saw there was but an hour left.

"Damon!" That was from the corridor. Yuna's voice. Too calm, Case thought. Yuna had a card up his sleeve. "Better give up!"

"Make us," Case called.

"There is a telecast machine in the room," came the reply. "Turn it on."

Yuna wasn't just wasting time. He knew something. Case hesitated, looked around and sighted the machine. It was the familiar kind, but with an unfamiliar attachment. He fiddled with it, got it going.

"Damon," said a voice he remembered but could not identify. "Turn up the video."

There was a threat in the words. But Case Damon was beyond being frightened. He had nothing to lose. Only curiosity made him flick the switch.

There was that room again, with its unpainted walls. There was the couch. And there was Karin!

"We decided to save her on the chance you'd get through," said the voice. A moment later, a man walked into view.

IT WAS Vargas. Somehow, Case was not surprised. It all made sense. Vargas had not wanted to join the Council. He'd held out for concessions, and those concessions had included a certain freedom from supervision of his country.

"Listen," Vargas said. "It is possible you have managed to do some harm

there. If so, undo it at once."

His hand dipped into his pocket and came out with a gun. He calmly pointed it at Karin's head. With a sinking heart, Case realized that this time there would be no interference, this time Vargas would go through with it.

"All right," Case said. "You win."

He turned away from the video, and swung his gun around at Burnine. He hated to do this, but it had to be done. His eyes avoided Burnine's as he said:

"Open that door."

But before Burnine could comply with the order, there was a shout from the machine. Case whirled, startled. The room in the fishing cabin had erupted into a maelstrom of struggling men. He saw Vargas go down, smothered by blue-jacketed men of Earth Intelligence.

And then there was Cranly, his broad back bent over Karin's figure on the couch. He straightened with a length of rope in his hands. She was free. Cranly turned and his face filled the screen.

"Nice going, Case. I had a hunch Vargas was behind this, but I couldn't move until I had him dead to rights. But it was you who helped me to fight the Council for the time I needed."

"How much time have I got?" Case wanted to know.

"Not much. The Council can't take a chance on having another city blasted. Within fifteen minutes they will destroy the machine Vargas built."

"That's time enough," Case said. "Give me a look at Karin."

He got his look, and then turned to Burnine. Yuna and his men had got the news elsewhere, apparently, for they were hammering at the door. But the lock was holding.

Together now, Case and Burnine turned their guns on the bars of the window. It went faster now. One bar melted away, another, still another.

There was room enough for Burnine, then room enough for Case's broad shoulders.

They dropped through and hit the ground, running. With Burnine leading the way and Case keeping him covered from behind, they raced around the edge of the tower, cut down a pair of surprised guards who weren't expecting them here, and skirted the outside tower.

Then the hangars were only yards away and they were sprinting toward them. Now there were no more men to block their way. Only time was the enemy.

And time ticked away on Case's watch as he and Burnine strapped themselves into their seats. Five minutes was all the time they could hope for. With his own ship that would have been enough, but this space liner was not built for speed.

CASE had deliberately spoken with more confidence than he'd felt. If that was to be his last look at Karin, he'd wanted her to have a smile on her face.

"All set," Burnine said. His skin was drawn tight over the long bones in his face.

They took off with all jets wide open. From stem to stern, the big liner shuddered. Even with all power on, they lifted slowly. From overhead, a small attack ship flashed in. Fire darted at them, slid harmlessly off the liner's duraloy plates.

"Wish that was our biggest worry,"

Case said. He could still grin weakly.

Now their speed was mounting steadily. The altimeter climbed past 60,000 and kept going. Case kept his eyes glued to the vision plate.

Now was the time. Thunder rumbled, roared in their ears. Far, far below and behind them there was another roar. Then came the single blinding flash that spelled the end of Kanato, and afterward a billowing mushroom cloud. It was the end of Yuna and his devilish weapon.

Over them, in the heart of the brightness, there was a black speck. It grew larger as they roared toward it. It was a black cleft in the azure. Case flashed a desperate glance at his watch. Seconds left, that was all.

With a prayer in their hearts, and with all jets blazing, they aimed for the blackness. It grew smaller, almost too small. There was a rumble of thunder. And they were through, into a black sky dotted with a myriad of stars.

Case reached up and flicked on the liner's telecast. It warmed up slowly, first the click coming through, and then the audio. Last of all, and best of all, the video.

Karin's face filled the screen. She was smiling, none the worse for her experience. Her hair was in disorder but it still looked like spun gold to Case. He could almost taste those velvety lips.

"Be with you soon, honey," Case said. "We've got a honeymoon to finish."

Her face beckoned him Earthward.

THE END

★ Evolution of the Stars ★

By FRAN FERRIS

ON CLEAR moonless nights the sky seems to be literally filled with stars, and some look close to the earth. But all stars are

amazingly far away, so far away in fact, that no telescope is powerful enough to reveal a star as anything but a point of light. Sir Isaac Newton

was the first to believe that the stars were quite a distance away, but even he failed to realize the very great distance and their vast immensity. Our solar system is like a tiny island in a vast ocean of space. The nearest star is Alpha Centauri, and that is twenty-five trillion miles away from earth. It is hard to think in trillions, so to get a better understanding of such a distance you should consider some facts about light. Light travels 186,000 miles a second. A beam of light could circle the earth's equator seven times in slightly less than one second. It takes eight and one third minutes for a ray of light to travel from the sun to the earth. In a year a beam of light would travel six trillion miles, and the nearest star is so far away that it would take four and one third years for its light to reach us. A "light year" is the distance light travels in a year. So Alpha Centauri is four and one third light years away, but the more distant stars in the Milky Way are 100,000 light years away. It is awe-inspiring to reflect on these facts when you look up into the clear night sky and realize that the light that reaches you from a certain star may have started your way when Columbus was crossing the ocean, and that the light from another star started when slaves were building the Great Wall of China, or when dinosaurs roamed the face of the earth.

Perhaps you have noticed that the stars are not equally bright. Some are so dim they can hardly be seen, while others twinkle brilliantly. Stars also differ in color. Many are brilliant white and some have a ruddy hue. The telescope reveals that the stars range in color from red, orange, yellow, white, then on to bluish-white, and blue. Astronomical research has revealed that there is a relation between the color of a star and its temperature. The red stars are red-hot, and the white stars are white-hot. The surface temperature of the hottest star is about 35,000 degrees Fahrenheit, while our own sun has a temperature of 10,000 degrees.

Astronomers have used the term "absolute magnitude" to describe the brightness which any star would have at a distance of 32.3 light years from the earth. From the surface temperature and the absolute magnitude, the diameters of the stars have been calculated. Stars range in size from about one third the size of our sun to about ten times the diameter of the sun. There are a few red stars known as super giants. Their diameters are as much as 480 times that of our sun.

In 1572, Tycho Brahe, a great astronomer, noticed a radiant fixed star of a magnitude never before seen. It grew in brilliance till it was brighter than Venus. It was so bright that it could be seen in the daylight as well as at night. Gradually it began to fade and in 1574 it disappeared from view. It was named "Tycho's Nova" from the Latin word for "new." Novae to be seen by the unaided eye are rare, but the telescope brings out about one nova a year. In reality it is not a new star, but an old one or

dim one that has suddenly burst out in new brilliance.

We are in the habit of thinking that stars are in fixed positions, but Halley has pointed out that stars are in motion. The movement of the stars has not caused any noticeable change in the heavens since historic times, but it is believed that in 250,000 years, the familiar patterns of the constellations will no longer be recognizable. Recent study has revealed that frequently a group of stars all go in the same motion, moving through space at the same speed and direction. These groups are called star "clusters" or "clouds." Our own sun seems to be in the middle of such a cluster, although it is not a member of it; that is, it does not travel with it. Star clusters are at almost undreamed of distances from the earth. The nearest cluster is 15,000 light years away. Of the 100 clusters now known, the most distant is about 150,000 light years away. Some astronomers believe that these clusters lie on the boundary of our galaxy, marking out its limits.

It is very hard to determine the evolution of a star, for the period of time that we have been studying them is but a second in their lifetime. But there probably are young, middle-aged, and old stars. They are always radiating away energy in the form of light and heat. There is the "contraction theory," which is that the gravitational pull of the star upon its own mass would cause it to contract and this contraction would produce friction which would cause a higher temperature of the gases composing the sun. According to this theory, a star starts life as a red giant, a large mass with little density and low surface temperature. As the star grows older, it begins to contract, it becomes more dense and hotter, and becomes orange in color. As it becomes still smaller, it turns to yellow, then white. It is now at its hottest stage, a blue-white giant. But as it continues to contract, its interior turns to liquid, and it radiates heat more rapidly than it can generate it by contraction and so it grows cooler. It gradually turns back to red. But it has contracted so much in its old age it is a red dwarf. This theory was generally accepted till 1924, but since then, observations have caused objections, and the theory has been altered. However, if a star contains a great store of matter which can be translated into energy, it may go through all the known sequences of stellar types, changing from red to white giants until it becomes a red dwarf and finally a white dwarf. The white dwarfs are the most interesting stars known. Just a few have been discovered. Their density is so great that just a teaspoonful of its material would weigh a ton. And yet this material behaves as a gas. It is hard to believe, but the fact is that the atoms composing it have lost all their outer electrons which take up all the room, and consist only of nuclei. Many "stripped" atoms can be packed into a very small space and still have room enough to behave like a gas.

SCIENTIFIC



MYSTERIES

THE PUZZLING AMERICAN PAGEANT

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

**The strange history of the American Continent
and man's search for a trace of his origin**

WHEN Spengler wrote his "Decline and Fall of The West" the Americas were in his mind just a vast blank. If he had known even the legends which we have followed, perhaps he would have never built a hook upon the premise that civilization began in the Orient. We have no right to make such a dogmatic premise in the face of ruins such as those at Lake Titicaca, and the ones under the old lava flow in Mexico.

Nor for that matter, would the book of Gibbon (Spengler's master), have ever seen light had he studied the Americas. Gibbon could never have built up his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" with its premises built upon the youth and age of civilizations if he had known anything at all of the Americas. Gibbon has enjoyed too much of a vogue in the entire thinking of a world, and it is high time that someone pointed out the fallacies of his reasoning.

The world cannot be glibly divided into "young" and "old" peoples, the "young" savage races always inclined to be slightly barbaric but vigorous, while the "ancient" peoples are "soft" and though intelligent, yet slightly addicted to mental intoxication. He might have found such a condition in the succeeding periods of Europe, though it is to be doubted if the conquerors are ever responsible for the ensuing civilization because of some divine spark in their souls. The civilization arose, say in Greece of the golden age, not because the incoming Aryan Dorians, etc., were super men, but because the magnificent civilization of Crete recovered enough in a thousand years after they had overthrown it, to educate and amalgamate its conquerors and take upon itself a second flowering period.

Civilization is rather to be pictured as a vast flower bed which has an unusual rallying power. Invasion after invasion will pour over it, temporarily setting it back into a series of "dark ages" which end only when its conquerors are absorbed and educated. Yet it is seldom the conqueror's culture which survives but that of the conquered. The language, on the other hand, and often the religion, follow the conqueror, yet scratch the peo-

ple and you will find the old customs and the old beliefs slightly modified but essentially intact. To one who has studied the civilization and lore of the Amerind, the Mexican is about twenty per cent Spanish in his culture, and eighty per cent Indian. At his table one eats the same foods as pictured upon the temples of Yucatan! In his music one hears the gourd-rattle, the ancient marimba and a variety of the old guitar-like harp. Go to his so-called "Christian festivals" and you will recognize the masks, elaborate head-dresses, clowns, and a thousand other marks of pre-Spanish America.

If the study of Archaeology teaches us one thing it is that one cannot pin a particular culture to a people until one has studied the civilization which it has conquered. One must go backward, not dogmatically forward as Gibbon has done, believing in the divine mission of the savage, to remake the civilization he has had the good fortune to overrun.

Nor can we find in the Americas an upward spiral which Europe, in spite of its blood-drenched struggles, seems to present. The study of the Americas is a study of a progressive degeneration. The loss of ancient knowledge, which is real degeneration, is most obvious upon every hand. Here the savage may be not the "youngest" but the most ancient, and his barbarism not due to natural vigor but rather to a ritualism from the depths of a hoary antiquity whose symbols bear the imprint of a vast astronomical knowledge, long lost.

In the following of the totems, or the unfolding of the American vistas of the past, I have attempted to take this method of the scientist, carrying the reader back from conqueror to conquered, as the scientist must study them, thus allowing him to partake of the scientist's challenge, and feel some

(Continued on page 151)

² Tortillas, beans, squash, and various "Mexican" foods, highly seasoned with the native spices, will be recognized in the descriptions of early travelers and upon old paintings some two thousand years old.

Under the threat of the guard's sword he knelt in a humble way



The RETURN of THARN

by HOWARD BROWNE

Tharn, mighty Warrior of the Dawn, fights the evil of cunning men to rescue his beloved Dylara, held captive. A thrilling conclusion!



3-PART SERIAL—CONCLUSION

SYNOPSIS OF PART 2

TRAKOR, young warrior of the tribe of Gerdak sets out to prove his prowess as a hunter to win the lovely Lanoa. He is beset by Sadu, the lion, and Tharn, heroic warrior of

the dawn age, saves his life. Tharn is in quest of his beloved Dylara, who has been captured by Jotan of Ammad. Trakor, worshipping the mighty figure, Tharn, joins Tharn in his search.

Dylara meanwhile has escaped from Jotan's clutches, and is wandering through the dense and dangerous jungles. Jotan vows that he will recapture the beautiful girl and bring her back to Ammad.

In Ammad, the traitor Vokal, desiring the death of Jaltor and the crown of Ammad, conspires with Heglar, an old sickly man, to accuse Garlud, father of Jotan, of high treason against the king. For doing this, Heglar will receive a thousand *tals*.

The plot is carried out, and Garlud is brought before Jaltor and accused of treason. Garlud, lifetime friend of Jaltor, denies the plot vigorously, but Jaltor is convinced that his friend has turned against him and has Garlud thrown into a dungeon.

Vokal meanwhile sends out an armed troop to intercept Jotan's return to Ammad, the plan being to kill Jotan. With father and son out of the way, Vokal will inherit their wealth. And the lovely Dylara.

Dylara, beloved of Tharn, is captured by a race of spider men. She manages to escape and flees into the jungle again. She is beset suddenly by Sadu, the lion, and as the beast attacks her, a dozen spears suddenly fell Sadu. Dylara turns to find herself captured by an armed troop—the men of Vokal.

Tharn meanwhile has found Jotan and Jotan swears that Dylara has escaped him. Tharn believes Jotan and releases him. Then he and Trakor set out again on the jungle trails. They find the night-fires of Vokal's camp. And Tharn sees Dylara. . . . Now go on with the story.

THOSE who let emotion rule filled early graves, however. A dead Tharn was useless to himself and useless to Dylara—and any such wild charge would be completely suicidal. Dylara seemed in no immediate danger, although it was clear from her actions, as well as the actions of those about her, that she was not sharing that cooking fire as an honored guest.

He fingered the string of his bow at its place about his shoulder. How he would have liked to send her some message that help was near, that soon she would be taken from these men and restored to the arms of one of her own kind. An arrow from out of the darkness into the heart of one of those men near her!

No. To do that would rouse the camp, keep them all awake for the rest of the night. For Tharn's purpose those Ammadians must remain lulled by a sense of security provided by their circle of fires. The quieter the night, the smaller the number of sentries to be posted when the time came for seeking sleeping furs for the night.

Trakor, too, was making good use of his eyes. This was the first party of Ammadians he had ever seen and he was open-mouthed with interest. The strange white skins they wore, the pieces of beautifully shaped leather on their feet, fascinated him and he longed to own such wondrous things. He stared for a long time at Dylara, marvelling at her beauty. Even Lanoa, whose beauty paled into nothingness that of every woman of Gerdak's tribe was just another she when compared to this vision of loveliness. The thought made him smile a little sadly. It was the first time he had thought of Lanoa in nearly a moon.

Tharn said, "Remain here, Trakor, while I hunt for food."

The younger man nodded and Tharn slipped silently away. After he was gone Trakor lay down on a branch so situated as to give him an

unimpeded view of the scene below and continued to watch . . .

A slight movement of his support aroused him. Tharn, laden with meat from a fresh kill, came to squat beside him and they filled their bellies with the hot, succulent raw flesh.

The young man wiped his hands and lips free of blood and turned inquiring eyes on his companion. "Have you thought of a way to take her from them, Tharn?"

The cave lord shook his head. "It will depend on where she sleeps and on how many guards are posted. Nothing can be done until the camp is settled for the night. Now we shall sleep."

With Tharn wedged into a tree fork in a neighboring tree, Trakor was left to select his own couch. He made no move toward doing so, however, but continued to lay along that same branch watching the Ammadians. He wondered how Tharn was able to go so calmly to sleep when so much that was new and exciting was taking place. His own weariness was completely forgotten.

An hour passed. Most of the camp was sleeping now. Four guards were moving slowly about the circle of fires; these and a group of five or six warriors talking about the ashes of a cooking fire were the only exceptions. Dylara was sound asleep, wrapped in a bundle of borrowed furs and lying well away from the nearest Ammadian.

A plan was taking shape slowly in Trakor's active mind. Why couldn't he rescue Dylara? This was his big chance to show Tharn how well he had profited by the cave lord's teachings. How proud his friend would be when he awakened to find Dylara beside him safe and sound, rescued by the stealth and daring of his protege!

The longer Trakor thought about it, the better it looked. Impatiently

he glowered at the dawdling warriors about the last fire. Were they to sit there gossiping throughout the night? At any moment Tharn might awake and spoil the whole thing!

Good! That last group was breaking up. One of them went over to the side of the sleeping girl, bent and stared at her, then straightened and called something to his companions. There was a brief sound of coarse laughter, the warrior rejoined his fellows and all sought their sleeping furs.

Another hour inched by. It was an unusually quiet night. Only twice did Trakor hear the voices of the big cats and each time it was from a distance. The darkness was absolute except for the dying flames from the protecting circle of fire below. Heavy clouds, forerunners perhaps of the storm Tharn had forecast, obscured moon and stars.

Those four guards continued their casual pacing. Trakor, watching intently, observed something finally that served to crystallize his plans. At fairly regular intervals those four came together at a point well away from where Dylara lay. Each time they stood in a group for several moments while they exchanged pleasant-ries, breaking the monotony of standing guard.

With slow caution, lest he arouse Tharn, the young cave man slipped groundward. There he began a slow circling of the clearing, masked from the sentries by heavy foliage. When he reached a spot on a direct line from where Dylara lay, he gently lowered himself bellyflat in the ribbon of grasses between the forest and the protecting wall of fire and began to inch himself forward like a giant snake.

Luckily the grass was high enough to hide him. His greatest danger was that one of those experienced warriors might glimpse the manner in which the grass tops were swaying.

He was near enough now to feel the heat of flames. His heart was pounding mightily and his fingers seemed to be trembling as he dragged himself still closer. Did they tremble with fear, he asked himself? No; it was only excitement that caused him to react so—of this he was certain.

According to his calculations those four guards should be close to another of those brief meetings on the opposite side of the camp. Slowly he lifted his head until he could make out their, and his own, position.

He was a few seconds behind schedule: the four of them were already together and not quite as far away as he would have liked. But in his favor was the fact that he was much closer to where Dylara lay sleeping than he had expected to be.

There was no time for hesitation, no time to bolster his courage. Rising to his feet, his body bent into a deep crouch, Trakor sped with swift silence through a break in the fire wall. Beyond this, five hurried strides brought him beside the sleeping cave princess. He wasted no time in glancing around to learn if his daring move had been witnessed. He could feel the skin crawl at his back as he bent, shoved a fold of the girl's sleeping furs across her face to drown out any involuntary cry, and swung her up into his arms.

He wheeled to flee . . . then froze in his tracks at sight of three spears leveled at his naked chest.

CHAPTER X BEYOND AMMAD'S WALLS

THE stifling folds of fur suddenly thrust forcibly against her face awakened Dylara from a sound sleep. So dazed was she by the sudden attack that her paralyzed muscles were unable to resist as she felt herself swung up into a crushing embrace.

Then her momentary inertia snapped and she was on the point of strug-

gling to free herself when the strong arms about her abruptly relaxed their hold and she staggered free.

With her eyes uncovered once more she saw a young warrior of the caves—a youth no older than she—beside her. Straight and tall he stood, menaced by three spears in the hands of three Ammadian fighting men, his strong, handsome, intelligent face reflecting fierce pride and deep chagrin. About his shoulders were looped a heavy blackwood bow, a quiver of stone-tipped arrows and a long grass rope. A flint knife was thrust within the folds of a loin-cloth of panther skin.

He stood there, a barbaric figure, eyeing those three spearheads leveled at his broad chest—eyeing them with a kind of dignified contempt that so reminded Dylara of Tharn, greatest warrior of them all, that she felt quick tears spring to her eyes. How truly magnificent were the men of her own kind when compared with these underdeveloped, almost frail, Ammadians!

Now came Ekbar, captain of Vokal's guards, pushing his way roughly through the press of aroused warriors hemming in both captives. He shoved his tall, square-shouldered body in front of Trakor and took in the situation at a glance.

"Disarm him!" he barked.

Hands tore away bow, arrows, rope and knife. Ekbar moved closer, his deep-set gray eyes moved appraisingly over the youth's splendid frame, and the already surly cast to his countenance deepened under a scowl.

"So, barbarian," he thundered, "you sought to take your mate from us! Only a stupid cave beast would expect to outwit Ammad's warriors. By what name are you called?"

"Trakor," said the youth, his voice emotionless.

"Trakor, eh? Where lie the caves of your tribe?"

"I belong to no tribe."

Without warning, Ekbar brought up a calloused hand and struck the young Cro-Magnard across the face, staggering him. "Another of your lies," he snarled, "and I turn you over to my men as a spear target. Where are your caves?"

Trakor made no attempt to reply. An angry red welt marked his cheek where Ekbar's hand had landed. His eyes were gleaming like sun against ice, but nothing else in his face betrayed the fury and hatred boiling within him. Truly, Trakor had come a long way since that day when Tharn had saved him from Sadu.

"How many came here with you?" Ekbar demanded.

"I came alone."

"Is this girl your mate?"

"No. I have never seen her before."

"Do you expect us to believe you risked certain capture to steal from us a girl you never saw before?"

Trakor shrugged. "You asked me. I do not care whether you believe me."

Ekbar's scowl deepened as he turned to Dylara. "You said you were brought here by Jotan. Was this barbarian one of his slaves?"

Dylara shook her head. "No. Nor have I ever seen him before tonight."

The captain chewed his lip uncertainly. "It is very strange," he complained. "I think both of you are lying. Well, if there are others who hope to take you from us, they will get the same welcome!"

He motioned to two of his men. "Bind this cave beast's arms and legs. Put him and the girl together in the center of the camp and triple the guard. Vokal shall have two new slaves at least!"

AN hour later most of the Ammadian camp was asleep once more. A dozen guards now patrolled the site and the fires were high again with additional fuel.

Dylara lay on her side, covered with sleeping furs to keep out the chill of

damp earth and night air. Only a few feet away lay Trakor, bound and helpless, his broad back turned to her exactly as they had left him.

It was a good-looking back, she admitted—not yet fully developed since its owner was still quite young, but it was well-formed and muscular nonetheless.

What, she wondered, was the real reason behind his attempt to take her from the Ammadians? Was he a member of some neighboring tribe? Had he come to spy on the men of Ammad, caught sight of her and tried to take her for himself?

She flushed a little at the thought. Not given to false modesty, Dylara knew she was very beautiful. But beauty, it seemed, could be more curse than blessing. It was that beauty which had led Tharn to take her by force from her own people; that beauty which had brought Jotan to her feet and caused him to take her with him on his return to Ammad. And now it appeared this handsome young cave warrior had been drawn into a lifetime of slavery by a single glimpse of her!

Yet she was woman enough to feel a little glow of pride at this tribute to her loveliness. He was young and very attractive—in many ways like Tharn, although his physical development was far short of the latter's.

The thought of Tharn brought an image of his mighty steel-thewed body and god-like face before her mind's eye. Where was he this night? Were his bones dotting the sandy surface of Sephar's arena while Nada, his mother, mourned? Or had he won through against hopeless odds and escaped to return to the caves of his people. She did not know, of course; perhaps she would never know . . .

Trakor rolled over to face her.

For a long moment the man and the woman stared deep into each other's eyes. Then the youth's lips parted in a slow smile, his strong regular teeth

gleaming in the distant light of the fires.

"I am Trakor," he whispered. "You are Dylara!"

Open astonishment showed on her face. "How could you know that?"

She had spoken in her natural voice and alarm flickered in Trakor's eyes as they shifted to look about the silent camp. "Shhh!" he hissed. "Keep your voice down, else they hear and separate us."

Obeying, she said, "But how do you know my name?"

"Tharn told me."

"Tharn!" In spite of Trakor's warning, the word burst from her throat in a single loud exhalation. "But that is im--"

"Shhh!"

A sleeper a yard or two away stirred and turned over, while Dylara and Trakor lay unmoving, hardly daring to breathe. Dylara felt her heart thumping wildly while a hundred mixed emotions seemed to be battling within her. Questions, many questions welled up and sought to force her lips apart. At last she could bear it no longer.

"He is alive?" she whispered. "Is he still in Sephar? When did you see him last? Did he send you to find me? How were you able to follow me here?"

Trakor was shaking his head, smiling. "Tharn did not send me. I came here with him. He is in one of the trees bordering this clearing!"

"Ohhh!" Dylara closed her eyes as a wave of weakness seemed to roll over her. Tharn is here! Tharn is here! Elation, thanksgiving and relief swelled her heart almost to the bursting point. No matter now that fifty Ammadians lay between her and the cave lord. Fifty times fifty of them could not prevail against the might and cunning of Tharn!

Suddenly a new thought cut sharply across the flood of elation. Why

was she so happy and thrilled to learn he had sought her out? Had not she, only a few suns ago, decided in favor of Jotan?

But Jotan was dead; the grinning Ekbar had told her so. Now, as then, she marvelled at how little the news depressed her. Yet she had brooded many times over the thought that Tharn was dead . . .

She opened her eyes. "But why did he send you to take me? Has he been hurt?"

Trakor reddened. "It was my idea; I wanted to help him."

He told her the whole story then, how he had met Tharn, the debt he owed the cave lord, their hunt, together, for Dylara — everything. When he came to that part of his story detailing his ill-advised attempt to free Dylara, he stammered a little but got it all out.

Dylara was smiling as he finished. "It was very brave of you to try what you did. And although they caught you and have us both now, we need not worry. Tharn will take us from these people."

"I know that," Trakor said quietly. "It is only that he may think less of me for bungling things this way."

The girl shook her head. "You must know him better than that."

They fell silent as one of the guards sauntered in their direction during his routine inspection of the camp. Dylara, weary from her hours of jungle travel during the day before, fell asleep before the guard was at a safe distance for further conversation with Trakor.

When the youth saw she was sleeping, he lay there for a long time, staring at her loveliness and thinking bitter thoughts of his clumsiness in being taken captive. Tharn, he knew, would be unable to attempt a rescue with so many guards about; but tomorrow night the Ammadians, their suspicions lulled, would doubtless post no more than the usual number

of sentries. To Tharn, four of the dull-witted Ammadians would be hardly any problem at all!

SHORTLY before dawn the men of Ammad were filling their bellies and preparing to break camp. When the line of march was being formed, Dylara and Trakor were separated—the girl being placed between two warriors midway along the column; while the young caveman, his arms bound firmly behind his back, was stationed well up toward the front. Ekbar strode back and forth along the line, making certain each man was in his appointed spot, inspecting Trakor's bonds, and cautioning those responsible for both prisoners.

Shortly before Dyta pulled his shining head above the eastern horizon of serrated tree tops, the Ammadian captain barked an order and the double line of warriors got under way.

By mid-morning both forest and jungle began to thin out as the path underfoot lost its level monotony and began to become a steep incline. The air seemed to grow steadily cooler and gradually all underbrush beneath the trees began to thin out, then disappear entirely, leaving an almost park-like appearance to the forest. Even the trees were further apart and more and more often there were stretches of grassland without any trees whatsoever.

Shortly after noon, Ekbar called a halt at the edge of a vast plain covered with a rich green species of grass which seemed to grow no higher than a man's ankles. Here and then on the gently undulating vista of grassland stood trees, usually no more than one or two together. To the south, nearly at the horizon, was a long dark line that Trakor at first took to be clouds but which, later, he was to learn was the beginning of another expanse of forest and jungle.

Food was distributed and eaten, an hour's rest period was announced, and

the Ammadians gathered their strength for the final stage of the journey. From remarks the two prisoners overheard they learned that Ammad lay half a day's march beyond that distant line of trees, and that every man in the group was anxious to put the city's strong walls between him and the hated jungle.

Trakor was beginning to worry. Crossing that vast plain during the heat of day was bound to be a trying experience, especially for the comparatively frail girl. But worse than that, Tharn was going to be placed at a disadvantage in following them. These Ammadians were not complete fools; they would keep a sharp lookout in all directions against possible attack from animals or men; for Tharn to attempt to follow them during daylight hours would mean certain detection. Still, even though the cave lord was forced to wait until darkness before venturing out into the open, he could easily overtake the Ammadians while they were camped for the night.

ALL during the long afternoon which followed, Trakor kept shooting brief glances over his shoulder toward the north, half-expecting to catch a glimpse of his friend. But other than a distant herd or two of grass-eaters, no sign of life appeared.

Night came while the column was still an hour's march from the last barrier of jungle between it and Ammad. At an moment Trakor expected to hear the captain call a halt.

That call never came. Instead the group pushed on until the trees were reached; a brief stop was made near the mouth of a wide trail at that point while gumwood branches were found and ignited, and once more the column took up the march.

After two hours of plodding along the winding game path, flames from the smoking torches casting eerie

shadows among the thick foliage and heavy tree boles, Trakor could stand this uncertainty no longer.

"When," he said to the Ammadian warrior next to him, "are we to make camp for the night?"

The man gave him a sidelong glance and a crooked grimace of derision. "I thought you men of the caves were accustomed to walking long distances?"

"I can walk the best of you into the ground!" retorted Trakor. "But when night comes you usually stop and huddle behind fires lest the great cats get you."

The Ammadian scowled. "We are afraid of nothing! But only animals and uncivilized barbarians wander about the jungle at night. We are but a little way from Ammad; it would be senseless to spend a night in the open when the city is so close."

Trakor's heart sank. "Only a little way from Ammad!" The words beat against his mind like the voice of doom. Dylara and he were lost; Tharn could not save them now!

Yet hope did not leave him entirely. His boundless faith and admiration where the cave lord was concerned would not let it die. He caught himself glancing time and again at the low-swaying boughs overhead. Every flickering shadow from the torches was transformed into the lurking figure of his giant friend.

But as the hours passed and nothing happened those last faint glimmerings of hope began to fade and his spirits sank lower and lower.

Ahead of him, Dylara was going through much the same travail. She staggered often now from weariness; for she had been on her feet, except for that brief period at noon, since early morning and she lacked the strength and stamina of the others. She wondered, too, if Tharn would make an attempt at rescuing Trakor and her before Ammad was reached; but the memory of his fearless en-

trance into Sephar in search of her brought the thought that he might do the same thing this time.

ABRUPTLY the forest and jungle ended at open ground. Beyond a mile of open ground, flooded by Uda's silver rays, stood the towering stone walls of Ammad.

To the dazed, unbelieving eyes of Trakor it was like a scene from another and wonderful world. In either direction, as far as he could see, rose that sheer, massive man-made wall of gray stone, broken at wide, regular intervals by massive gates of wood. Far beyond the wall he could see mammoth structures of stone at the crest of five small hills. The sides of those hills were lined with other, and smaller buildings of the same material. Lights twinkled from breaks in their walls, an indication that, unlike the cave men, Ammadians did not spend most of the night hours asleep.

Dylara, accustomed to city walls and buildings of stone from her long stay in Sephar, was not so overcome by the scene. Still Ammad's size, even from the small part visible at this point, brought a gasp to her lips. She had thought Sephar wonderful beyond compare, but next to Ammad, it was hardly more than a frontier outpost.

A challenging voice rang out from the shadowy recess shielding the nearest gate and Ekbar's column ground to a halt. Three Ammadian soldiers, their white tunics gleaming under the moon's rays, moved toward them and Vokal's captain advanced to meet them.

After a brief discussion, the three warriors returned to their posts, the twin gates swung wide, Ekbar's command sounded and the column of fifty Ammadians, accompanied by the two prisoners, filed briskly through the opening.

Trakor, looking back over his

shoulder, saw the twin gates move slowly, grindingly together, saw the reaches of distant jungle narrow, then disappear as those two sections of heavy planking ground firmly into place.

And in the dull, sodden thud of their meeting, the last flicker of hope was extinguished in Trakor's heart.

* * *

IT WAS the hour of Jaltor's daily audience. The vast throne room was crowded with men and women from all walks of Ammadian life. Slaves, freedmen, merchants, traders, warriors and noblemen crowded that two-thirds of the room set aside for their use.

At the far end of the hall-like chamber, set off from the heavily crowded section by a line of stalwart guards armed with spears, stood a pyramid-shaped dais, its sides serrated into wide steps. At the flattened apex stood a richly carved, high-backed chair of dark wood. Here sat Jaltor, king of all Ammad, his tremendous, beautifully proportioned body seeming to dwarf not only the chair and its supporting dais but the entire room as well. He was bending forward slightly at the waist, his head turned slightly the better to hear the words a nobleman was droning into his ear. The shuffling of many feet, the buzz of many muted voices from beyond the line of guards formed a backdrop of sound against the message he was receiving.

Because of the ever-present possibility of assassination at the hand of some disgruntled commoner or a hired killer, only the noblemen of Ammad were allowed to pass that spear-bristling line of guards. As a result, the citizenry of the city was split into factions, each faction owing its allegiance to that nobleman situated in its district. The nobleman justified

the loyalty of his faction by protecting its members against criminals and vandals both within and without his district and by pleading their side of any dispute that could be settled only by Jaltor, head of the State.

Rivalry between noblemen was strong and usually bitter, although none of this ever appeared on the surface. A nobleman whose influence and power showed signs of weakening found his territory subjected to raids, his followers won away from him by threats and promises. With the loss of influence and power his wealth would dwindle, his guards and warriors would desert to other noblemen, until at last Jaltor must step in and elevate some favorite of his own, or some friend of another noble, into the victim's place.

Against a side wall of the teeming throne room, on this particular afternoon, stood Vokal, nobleman of Ammad. On his smooth, finely featured face was his accustomed air of dreamy disinterest in his surrounds, his soft gray hair was carefully arranged to point up its natural wave, his slender shapely arms were carelessly folded across the chest of his plain white tunic. There was no purple edging on that tunic now; in the palace of Jaltor only the king himself could display that color.

Beneath that serene exterior, however, was no serenity. Vokal was badly worried. Eleven suns had passed since the day word of Heglar's attempt to kill Jaltor had electrified all Ammad. Guards had hustled the old man roughly from the throne room—and from that moment on no one heard of him again.

But he should have been heard of! Four slaves of slaves—the lowest human element in Ammad—should have dragged his traitorous old body through Ammad's streets to be spat upon and reviled by loyal citizens.

And Garlud—what of Garlud? No one had seen him either since that

day. Not that his absence caused much speculation — almost none in fact. It was not unusual for Ammad's noblemen to absent themselves from the city for days, even moons, on end. A hunting trip, a visit to friends in other of Ammad's cities—any of several explanations would have accounted for his disappearance.

THE true reason should have been his involvement in Heglar's plot to do away with Jaltor. But only Vokal of all Ammad's thousands could know that—and he had no business knowing it. Garlud's affairs were going on smoothly in his absence, in charge of the captain of his guards. By this time, if Vokal's plans had not miscarried, the silvery haired nobleman should have been summoned by Jaltor, told of Garlud's perfidy, and his holdings and position handed to him in view of Jotan's continued absence.

And then there was Rhoe—Heglar's young and beautiful wife . . . and Vokal's mistress. He had not seen her since the day her husband had made the attempt on Jaltor's life. This was agreed upon between them for safety's sake; the understanding was that once Heglar's death was known, Vokal could court and win her in the usual manner.

But what had been foreseen as only two or three days of separation had lengthened into eleven and still no word of Heglar's fate. Long before this those thousand tals paid to Heglar should have come back into Vokal's hands, accompanied by Rhoe herself. Vokal was becoming increasingly uneasy about those missing tals; let enough time elapse before he could take Rhoe as mate and she might reconsider, refuse Vokal and keep the thousand tals for herself. There would be nothing he could do about it, either. To threaten her or use force could anger her into betraying him . . . Vokal shuddered. Only this morning

she had sent word to him that she was tired of this uncertainty, that something must be done to learn what had happened to her husband.

Another thing: Ekbar and his men should have returned before this—returned with word that Jotan, Garlud's son, was dead and no longer in a position to step into his father's sandals as first ranking nobleman of Ammad. What was delaying the man?

Well, Vokal told himself doggedly, he could wait no longer. There were ways to get at the truth—ways that would not betray his interest in the matter. For instance, there was Sitab, an officer in Jaltor's own palace guard . . .

But first would come another plan at breaking that wall of silence. This same morning, Vokal had remembered a case involving a merchant whose shop was on the boundry line between Vokal's territory and the neighboring district belonging to Garlud. A moon or so before, one of Vokal's collectors had informed Ekbar that this merchant was claiming allegiance to Garlud, even though his shop was not in the latter's territory.

It was a minor matter and as a rule a nobleman did not complain to Jaltor about these single isolated cases. It was only when there was evidence of some systematic raid by a neighboring nobleman that a complaint was filed. Clearly Garlud had not ordered any such raid, but enough evidence was there at least to bring the matter to Jaltor's attention, thus making it necessary for Garlud to defend himself against the charge.

"Vokal—the noble Vokal." The cry of Jaltor's personal clerk rang out over the packed room. "Approach the Throne and present your plea."

With gentle courtesy Vokal pushed between the press of humanity, passed through the line of armed guards and mounted the steps of Jaltor's dais.

He bowed low before the giant ruler of Ammad. "Greetings, Most-High.

Vokal, your loyal subject, begs permission to plead a grievance."

Jaltor gave him a warm and friendly smile. He had always liked Vokal; the nobleman's quiet manner and gentle courtliness were always welcome.

"It is unusual for the noble Vokal to have a grievance," he said. "That in itself is in your favor. What is troubling you?"

"A matter of a boundry dispute involving a merchant in my territory. It seems he has been 'influenced' into transferring allegiance to another nobleman."

Jaltor nodded his understanding. "Have you been bothered by many such cases involving the same nobleman?"

"No, Most-High," Vokal said. "And I am quite sure Garlud knows nothing of this one. Perhaps one of his collectors is a bit—over zealous. By bringing the matter to Garlud's attention at this time, further incidents can be averted."

NOTHING changed in Jaltor's expression at mention of Garlud's name; Vokal was sure of that. He said, neither too quickly nor too slowly:

"I agree, noble Vokal: this must have happened without Garlud's knowledge. Unfortunately the matter can not be brought to his attention just now, but I shall see to it that he hears about it at the earliest possible moment."

It was an opening Vokal could not resist. "The noble Garlud is not in Ammad at present?"

"I believe not." Jaltor's voice and manner remained unchanged, but something flickered in his eyes—something Vokal did not miss.

"My deepest thanks to you, Most-High," he said with that gracious and gentle air for which he was noted.

"It is always a pleasure to talk with you, Vokal."

It was a dismissal and Vokal, bowing low, withdrew. As he crossed the huge throne-room toward the exit, his thoughts were sharp and incisive.

Something had happened to Garlud. Jaltor's eyes and the brevity of his answer to Vokal's question confirmed that. But what? And why was the nobleman's fate kept such a secret? Did Jaltor suspect Garlud of having accomplices other than old Heglar?

These were questions demanding quick and positive answers. First he must learn what had happened to the missing nobleman. If his death could be verified—and, of course, Heglar's as well—there was a way to make the information open to the public. That done, and Vokal would be free to move up in rank to a place second only to Jaltor himself—as well as being able to marry Rhoa and recover his thousand tals.

A great deal of careful thought must go into his next move. And so Vokal left the palace and returned to his home, where, in the quiet of his private apartment, he would be able to concentrate on these pressing problems.

WHEN the long hour of public audience was over, Jaltor returned to his quarters. His step was quick and purposeful and his dark eyes were alight with an inner excitement.

At the entrance to his apartment, the guard on duty there leaped to attention at his approach. To him Jaltor snapped, "Find Curzad at once and inform him I wish to see him immediately."

The guard saluted and went swiftly off along the corridor.

A clay jug of wine, cooling in a low basin of water on one of the tables of polished wood, caught the monarch's eye. Not bothering to use one of the several goblets standing nearby, Jaltor swung the jug to his lips and took a long, satisfying

draught on the contents, wiped his lips on the back of a muscular forearm and began to pace the floor.

A light knock sounded at the door and Curzad, as iron-faced and reserved as ever, came into the room. He was in the act of closing the door behind him when Jaltor said, "Wait. Send the guard out there away. I don't want our conversation overheard, even by the most trustworthy of your men."

Curzad obeyed, then closed the door and came into the room, standing there stiff-backed, waiting further orders.

Jaltor jerked a thumb at a chair. "Sit down, my friend, and help yourself to the wine."

The captain of the palace guards let himself gingerly down into the luxurious depths of soft upholstery and reached for the wine jug and a goblet. Most of Ammad's noblemen would have lifted outraged eyebrows at such familiarity between the world's most powerful monarch and a mere warrior. But Curzad and Jaltor had fought side by side in many a battle and through many a campaign, and each honored and respected the other.

The tall broad-shouldered king dropped into a chair across from Curzad and took up jug and goblet. "Tell me, Curzad, how fares the noble Garlud?"

"As well as in the days he walked Ammad's streets a free man," the captain said in his deep calm voice. "As an old fighting-man, hardship affects him but little."

"Perhaps his cell is too comfortable," Jaltor said, his lips twitching slightly.

"There are no comfortable cells beneath your palace, Most-High. Garlud's least of all. He sits alone and in utter darkness, the only sounds the scurrying feet and squeaking voices of rats. Only the strong mind of a great warrior can endure such

for very long without cracking."

"Are you suggesting I am too harsh with him?" Jaltor was openly smiling now.

"I am suggesting nothing to Ammad's king."

"It has been eleven suns since I sent my closest friend to languish in those pits," Jaltor said, smiling no longer. "Nor has it been easy for me, Curzad. But I must learn who, if not Garlud, was behind old Heglar's attempt on my life."

He tossed off the wine and put his goblet down on the table top. "Something happened today," he said, "that may be the first crack in this eleven-sun wall of silence. One of Ammad's noblemen brought up Garlud's name to me during the afternoon audience."

SOME of the impassiveness in Curzad's expression slipped a little and his fingers whitened on the goblet's stem. He made a sound deep within his massive chest but said nothing.

"It may mean nothing, however," Jaltor went on, "for the way in which it came up was both necessary and natural. To make it even more likely to amount to nothing, the nobleman was Vokal—a man I have never hesitated to trust."

"Garlud once enjoyed a similar distinction," Curzad commented drily.

Jaltor's eyes flashed. "Do you forget that Garlud was named by a man whose word had never been doubted?"

"I forget nothing, Most-High," was the quiet reply.

A moment's silence followed, then Jaltor said, "Well, a few more days, one way or the other, will not matter. If Vokal is the man we are looking for, he will make another attempt at learning Garlud's whereabouts. So far he is our only lead—other than old Heglar's beautiful mate, Rhoa. Twice she has come to me, asking what has happened to him, and both

times I have refused to say. Oddly enough," he added thoughtfully, "she seemed more curious than worried."

"Perhaps it would be wise to have her watched."

The monarch gave a brief snort of laughter. "I am not completely a fool, my friend. Rhoa has been under constant surveillance since the day old Heglar died. Thus far her actions have been above suspicion."

Curzad's shoulders rose and fell in a shrug. "Meanwhile," he said, "Garlud's son, Jotan, draws closer to Ammad. Any sun now he and his men may approach its gates."

"Which is one of the reasons I sent for you. Shortly before Dyta brings his light tomorrow, send fifty of your most trusted warriors to intercept and take captive Jotan and his men. Return them to Ammad under cover of darkness and confine them all in the pits. It might be wise to place Jotan in the cell next his father and a trusted warrior in a neighboring cell to listen in on their conversations."

"You'll never trick Garlud so easily."

"No man is perfect, Curzad," observed Jaltor, smiling grimly. "I intend to overlook no possibility in getting to the bottom of this matter."

CHAPTER XI CAME THARN

ONCE Tharn was satisfied that the column of fifty Ammadians, with Dylara and Trakor in its midst, meant to cut directly across that wide expanse of sun-baked grasses, he set out on a circuitous course to pass them that he might be the first to reach the distant forest beyond. It meant covering a quarter again as much ground, but the advantage made this extra effort worth while.

As he moved across the prairie at a tireless trot, bitter thoughts filled his mind. Last night Dylara had been

almost within arm's reach and it seemed his long search for her was on the point of ending. Caution, ever a strong attribute of jungle dwellers, had brought on his decision to wait until the camp was settled down for the night before he attempted to wrest her from the Ammadians who held her captive. Had the circumstances demanded it, Tharn would unhesitatingly charged all fifty of those armed men; but only the inexperienced uses force where stealth will do.

And so Tharn had restrained his impatience, deciding to nap an hour or two while he waited. He had awakened to loud voices and had witnessed, in helpless rage, Ekbar's cross-examination of Trakor and Dylara. His first reaction was anger that Trakor had attempted a deed beyond his still limited prowess, but understanding came at once. It was in this fashion that the boy had sought to show his gratitude to Tharn, and in so doing had alerted the camp—and gotten himself captured in the bargain!

Thus by the impulsive act of a hero-worshipping boy had Tharn's original task become a double one—and doubly difficult to accomplish successfully.

At first he considered entering the camp after another hour or two, but with the trebling of the guard he gave up the idea—for the night at least. There would be other nights—nights when the number of guards would be normal and their behavior the same. Guards, it was well known, were apt to become heavy-eyed and less alert along toward dawn.

All during the following morning Tharn trailed the Ammadians. At first he did so from a position among the branches above them; but along toward mid-morning the trees began to thin out, as well as the undergrowth normally covering the ground between the giant boles, and he was forced to lag further and further behind. When the fifty men reached the

prairie's edge and stopped to rest, he managed to work his way close enough to hear conversations among several of the men.

Their talk was filled with eagerness at being close to Ammad once more, and Tharn was aware of a feeling of sharp disappointment. Was it possible this group would reach the city before nightfall? If that were true, his chances of freeing Dylara and Trakor were small indeed.

An hour later Tharn was standing in the shelter of a large tree, his eyes regretfully watching as the entire party forged across that broad stretch of open ground where he might not follow.

Two hours before sunset Tharn reached the wall of jungle and trees. The column of Ammadians were still far out in the grasslands and would need another three hours to reach the game trail where Tharn was standing. The cave lord decided to spend that time in reconnoitering. There was the possibility that Ammad itself lay not too deep within the forest to make it worthwhile for the approaching column to continue its march even after darkness fell.

It was as he had feared. Less than an hour's swift progress through the forest's upper terraces brought him to the edge of a vast clearing, much like the one surrounding Sephar, beyond which rose sheer grey walls of stone. From his elevated position he could see beyond that barrier, and he saw that, except for its far greater size and magnificence, Ammad was not much different from Sephar. But in size alone did Ammad make Sephar seem a small jungle clearing by comparison. In diameter it was at least ten miles and there were five small hills grouped near its center, at the apex of each a magnificent structure. The general layout of streets was much the same as he had found in Sephar, but there were more people on them.

FOR nearly an hour Tharn sat high among the concealing foliage of his tree and watched the scene below and before him. Hunting parties well laden with trophies of the hunt entered the clearing from the trail beneath him and the great gates of wood, guarded by Ammadian warriors, swung open to let them through the massive wall. It was a wall much higher and stronger than Sephar had boasted and getting past it was going to take some doing.

Tharn shrugged and turned back to pick up those who were holding Dylara and Trakor. Perhaps, he thought as he moved swiftly along the aerial highway, it would not be necessary for him to pass those walls. Even if those fifty Ammadians did not make camp for tonight, he might still find a way to rob them of their captives. Let them lower their guard for even a moment, let them become only a little careless—and their hands would be empty before their minds had caught up with their eyes!

He arrived at the prairie's edge only a few moments before Ekbar and his men reached the game trail's mouth. Tharn, narrow-eyed and alert, watched them halt and gather gumwood torches, saw these latter ignited and the march resumed. It was as he had feared: they intended to press on until Ammad's walls hemmed them safely in.

Even Tharn's iron-willed reserve broke a little at this last blow. Through the velvety darkness of a semi-tropical night he moved stealthily above them, his fangs bared slightly, his hand hovering often near his blackwood bow and the quiver of arrows.

Several times he saw Trakor's upturned face as the youth sought to pierce the wavering shadows cast by the flaming shadows. He knew well what was passing through Trakor's mind and, despite his own disappointment, he smiled a little. Let the head-

strong cave youth worry a little; it would be small payment indeed for the trouble he had caused!

But most often Tharn's eyes went to Dylara. He saw her stagger now and then from sheer physical exhaustion and his heart went out to her. How he would have loved to wrest her from that spear-bristling line of warriors! There was no way to do that, however. A barrage of arrows could have cleared away those men directly around her, but a rope about her wrist had its other end bound about the arm of the man beside her; and even had Tharn leaped down on the heels of his arrows to slash away that rope spears might fell either or both of them.

No, for all his giant strength and agility he was as helpless to aid the girl of his choice as though miles lay between them.

Finally the time came when Tharn realized Ammad was only a short distance ahead. He must resign himself to the unescapable fact that Dylara and Trakor were going to be taken beyond those walls whether he liked the idea or not. This meant his energies and cunning must be diverted to a different channel; and with this in mind the cave lord halted on a broad leafy branch above the column, waiting while the twin lines moved ahead at a snail's pace.

A pair of tall husky Ammadian warriors were last in line. One of them carried a blazing torch, the other had a heavy pack about his shoulders. They plodded along, weariness evident in the lines of bent shoulders and dragging feet. The one with the pack seemed especially tired and every fifty or sixty feet he would pause momentarily to shift his burden to a new position. Each time this happened the distance between him and his companion became a matter of ten or fifteen feet until, pack adjusted, the man hurried forward to join his unheeding partner.

A wry smile touched Tharn's firm lips. With uncanny ease he slipped to the ground and moved silently along behind the wall of undergrowth flanking the trail, his course parallel with the column's rear guard.

A BEND in the path was coming up. Already most of the column had made the turn and was out of sight. Quickly Tharn raced ahead until he was at a point no more than ten feet from the turn. Crouching here, concealed by a maze of creepers and brush, he picked up a short length of dead branch and waited.

As the last two Ammadians reached a position directly opposite to the crouching cave lord, Tharn thrust out the branch two or three inches above the path's surface and squarely between the legs of the pack bearer.

The man's swinging foot struck against the unyielding wood and, weighted by the heavy pack and weary from the long hours without rest, he stumbled and fell headlong.

His companion, aroused by the thump of a falling body and a string of curses rising on the night air, turned back and bent to help him up.

"What happened, Posak?"

"What does it look like? Do you thing I decided to lie down and rest awhile?"

Still muttering under his breath Posak got shakily to his feet and turned his back on his companion to pick up the heavy pack. When he turned back again, his amazed eyes beheld his friend face down and motionless in the trail and the mightily muscled figure of an almost naked cave man standing over him and holding the torch.

Posak opened his mouth to yell a warning to the others of the column. The cry was never voiced. An iron fist swept from nowhere to crash full against the point of his chin. There was a sharp brittle sound like a branch breaking and Posak sank life-

lessly to the ground, his neck snapped cleanly in two.

Quickly Tharn propped the torch of gumwood against a tree bole and dragged the two corpses into the brush. With rapid care he stripped tunic and sandals from one body and donned them. The tunic he found to be tight across his chest but still adequate; the sandals fitted him perfectly.

So quickly had the cave lord acted that by the time he caught up the torch and rounded the bend in the trail, the end of Ekbar's column was no more than a dozen yards away. No one seemed to be looking back of his shoulder in search of the missing pair, a fact probably explained by the sight of open ground directly ahead.

Blazing torch held high, thus leaving his face shadowed, Tharn moved easily along at the rear of the column of Ammadians, across the ribbon of open ground about Ammad's walls, and on through the city gates.

* * *

Vokai awakened under the touch of gentle but insistent fingers against his shoulder. He opened his eyes to find one of his personal slaves, a lighted candle in one hand, bending over him.

"What do you want, Adgal?" he demanded, scowling.

"Ekbar has returned, Most-High," the slave replied, cringing. "I told him you were sleeping but he demanded that I arouse you at once."

The nobleman bounded from the bed and caught up his tunic. "Where is he?"

"In the outer chamber, Most-High."

"Good. Tell him I'll be out immediately."

When Vokai entered the wide living room he found the captain of his guards standing at rigid attention just inside the door. The nobleman, his tunic fresh and unwrinkled, his

thick grey hair as smoothly brushed as though this were midday instead of the dead of night, strolled to a nearby table, poured out a single glass of wine and sank into a chair. His thin shapely fingers lifted the goblet slowly to his lips, he sipped the liquid as slowly, savoring its bouquet. Finally he put down the goblet and swung his dreamy-eyed gaze to the uncomfortable and self-conscious captain of the guards.

"Well, Ekbar?" he said softly.

"He is dead, Most-High."

"Indeed? You took care of the matter yourself?"

"No, Most-High. He was killed many suns before my men and I came upon his men. Sadu, the lion, slew him."

Vokal stiffened slightly. "How do you know this?"

Ekbar retold, in detail, the story given him by Tykol. For several minutes after he finished Vokal sat there and thought it over while he sipped from his goblet of wine. "... You are sure he was not lying?"

"Yes, Most-High. There were but thirty-seven of them, where once there was fifty, and many wore strips of cloth over wounds left by Sadu's claws. Scouts who knew Jotan by sight reported he was not with the column." He hesitated. "One part of their report I did not understand, however, although it probably is not important."

"Tell it to me."

Ekbar shrugged. "There was a woman with them—a young and very beautiful girl. The scouts say she was very lovely—dark-haired, a pleasing figure and clearly the daughter of some nobleman."

"Why did you not ask this Tykol who she was?"

"I learned about her the following day. By that time Tykol was dead."

Vokal nodded. "The balance of Jotan's men were not aware of being watched?"

"No, Most-High. I took pains to keep that from them. Since Jotan's earlier death was something we had not foreseen, I acted as I thought you would order. Since Jotan is not with them it would be better that they reached Ammad and told of his death under the fangs and claws of Sadu."

"You have acted wisely, Ekbar, and I shall not forget it."

The captain flushed with pleasure. He said, "We did not return empty-handed, noble Vokal. Two cave people fell into our hands—one of them a beautiful young woman who told us some wild story about being Jotan's intended mate."

At Vokal's look of languid interest, Ekbar repeated the story Dylara had told him.

"And you say," Vokal said when the captain finished, "that this cave girl is very beautiful?"

"There is none in all Ammad who is more lovely," Ekbar said, his deep-set eyes glittering.

"How interesting!" Vokal leaned back in his chair, his long, well-kept fingers toying with the stem of his wine goblet. "Where is she now?"

"Both she and the cave man we captured a little later are under guard in the outer corridor, Most-High. I thought you might wish to look them over before they were placed with the other slaves."

"Bring them in, my good Ekbar," murmured Vokal.

THE captain saluted stiffly and withdrew. A moment later he was back again followed by the two captives and a second guard.

For several moments the nobleman let his eyes move slowly over the two cave people. The man, he saw, was, despite his youth, a remarkable physical specimen, extraordinarily handsome and evidently intelligent and keen-witted as so many of the cave dwellers were. With the proper attitude toward his new master it would

not be long before he rose to the status of a warrior and an end to his position as slave. Judging from the flashing eyes and his air of insolent contempt, it would take a few days of iron-fisted discipline, however, to make him amendable. Well, Ekbar was a past master of that art.

The girl, though, was another matter entirely. Ekbar had not exaggerated in naming her more beautiful than any of Ammad's women—including those of noble birth. Despite her travel-worn tunic and the weariness evident in every line of face and figure, her beauty shone through like Dyta's brilliant rays. A man could lose his heart in that red-gold wealth of softly curling hair falling to her shoulders; he could drown in the depths of those sparkling brown eyes. He smiled a little at these thoughts. What would Rhoea, dark-haired, olive-skinned, beautiful and passionate, think if she knew he was having such thoughts about a wild girl of the caves?

Well, Rhoea need not know. Most noblemen had beautiful slave girls and most noblemen's wives ignored the fact . . .

Dylara bore his steady gaze with calm indifference. The enforced association with the men of Ammad during the past several moons had taught her a great deal about them; that, plus a native shrewdness, told her she could expect little sympathy and no help from this silver-haired, languid-eyed man whose property she now appeared to be.

"Your name, cave girl?"

The soft, almost caressing voice repelled her. There was something ugly and evil behind it—a reflection of the man's true personality.

She met his gaze unflinching. "I am Dylara."

"What is this wild story you told the captain of my guards—the story that you were the noble Jotan's mate?"

"I was never his mate. I am no man's mate."

"But he wanted you. Why, then, did he not take you?"

"Because, in spite of his being an Ammadian, Jotan was a true nobleman. He sought to win me with kindness and consideration instead of taking me by force."

Deliberately Vokal let his eyes wander over the beautiful lines of her figure. "From your tone I judge that you do not believe all Ammadians would be so considerate. From looking at you I would say he was more stupid than anything else . . .

"However, that is no longer important. Jotan is dead—and you now belong to me—to do with as I see fit. You may be sure I will not confuse consideration with stupidity!"

There was no mistaking his meaning. Dylara felt her cheeks burn, but before she could voice the angry retort trembling on her lips, Vokal turned his eyes to the silent and expressionless Ekbar.

"Confine the girl in one of the private rooms in the slave quarters," he said. "As for her companion, put him in with those slaves who work on the palace grounds. Keep me informed as to his general attitude. If he gives you any trouble, have him beaten until he becomes tractable."

* * *

ONCE past Ammad's walls, Tharn permitted the rest of Ekbar's column to draw gradually away from him until, to the eye of the casual passerby, he was not a part of that body but only a solitary warrior abroad on some affair of his own.

He would have liked nothing better than to continue on with the column until it passed through the walls of whatever estate they were headed for. But already his luck had held up far beyond what he had originally expected; to remain longer with Ekbar's warriors would have meant risking almost certain discovery that he was

not one of its original members.

He must keep the column in sight, however, until it reached its goal. Once he knew which of these stone walled estates was to swallow up Dylara and Trakor he would be free to enter in his own way and undertake their rescue.

At this late hour Ammad's streets were nearly deserted. An occasional solitary figure strode along with purposeful steps, and twice small groups of men, staggering and loud-mouthed from too much wine, blundered and weaved along the paved thoroughfares. On these latter occasions Tharn was careful to cross the street to avoid contact, for drunken men were notoriously unpredictable.

At last Ekbar's column ground to a halt outside a wide gate in a high wall of stone midway along one of the streets. Twin lanterns burned from a niche above those gates, their rays glinting on the spear points of four armed guards stationed there.

From the shadows of a wall across the street, Tharn watched as Ekbar held a brief conversation with those four sentries; then the gates swung wide and the column, Dylara and Trakor among its members, disappeared from view.

Tharn voiced a low grunt of approval and satisfaction. Somewhere within the huge sprawling building of four floors looming massively against the night sky was the girl he loved and the young man he had befriended. Within another hour the dwellers of that cliff-like dwelling would have finished welcoming the returning warriors and be back in their beds. Then would Tharn enter in search of their captives.

IN the interim a general reconnaissance seemed in order. The palace sat squarely atop one of Ammad's low hills amid wide grounds. Here and there behind the encircling wall a tree lifted its crested top, the night's gen-

tle wind stirring its leaves and branches.

Making certain his bow, quiver of arrows, grass rope and flint knife were in their accustomed places, Tharn set out for a leisurely stroll. For several hundred yards the street he followed lay unbroken by any intersecting avenue and in all that length the only life in sight was the group of four guards lounging outside that wide gateway which had swallowed up Dylara and Trakor.

When he reached a position directly opposite those four Tharn was aware that all of them were watching him from across the strip of paving that made up the street itself. At any moment he might be challenged and ordered to a halt.

But the challenge did not come and he passed casually on along the walk. They were behind him now and, unless he turned his head to look back, out of range of his eyes. His ears, however, were busy and soon they caught the sound of voices.

An intersection appeared ahead and unhesitatingly the cave lord cut diagonally across it and moved out of sight of the four sentries. If he expected to find this section of the wall unguarded, however, he was doomed to disappointment. Half way down the block a single lantern sent out feeble rays from a small niche directly above a single gate—a gate guarded by a patrolling sentry.

Because of the comparative narrowness of this street and the high walls on either side, heavy shadows left it in almost total darkness. Tharn, across the street and still a good hundred and fifty yards away, had not yet been observed by that lone sentry.

He might, Tharn realized, be able to pass the man once without arousing undue interest or suspicion. But should he attempt to retract his steps later on the guard would be almost certain to take some sort of action.

It was not that Tharn would be unable to handle the matter if that should happen, but there was always the possibility that others might be aroused by a warning cry.

Stooping, Tharn removed his sandals and, hugging the wall where shadows lay deepest, began a slow, careful advance.

Thirty paces the guard took in each direction before executing a brisk about face and retracing his steps. The leather soles of his sandals made crisp clear rhythmical sounds against the stone underfoot. Each time his measured pacing brought him toward Tharn, the cave lord remained frozen, hugging the wall; when he wheeled and started back Tharn raced lightly ahead, even while he counted off each step the sentry took. On the twenty-ninth pace Tharn would freeze again, then repeat the maneuver.

Finally the man of the caves reached the point where he dared go no further. He was still fifty or sixty feet down the street and another fifteen feet to one side. Hardly daring to breathe, he stood as motionless as the wall at his back until the man finished the routine of thirty paces toward him; then, as he wheeled and started back, Tharn unslipped his bow with unthinkable swiftness, fitted an arrow to its string. Mighty muscles rippled smoothly across that bronzed back as a steady hand bent the stubborn wood, a single musical "twang" sounded against the still air and flint-tipped death flickered for an immeasurable instant between the two men.

True to its target flew Tharn's arrow, the sharp point striking squarely at the juncture of neck and the skull's base. Wide flew the sentry's arms and he fell soundlessly in a crumpled heap, the spear still tightly clutched in one dead hand.

Even while the body was still falling Tharn was bounding toward the now unguarded gate. Unbarring it, he

drew the lifeless warrior out of sight beyond, then closed the gate with his back.

HERE at the wall's base was darkness, but a few steps beyond was a moonfilled clearing dotted with carefully spaced bushes and an occasional tree. A curving path of crushed rock led across cropped grass and ended at a wide door of the palace itself.

Although the hour Tharn had allotted himself before entering the palace was not up, there were no signs of life anywhere about the grounds, nor did man-made light gleam through any of the windows on this side of the building. Yet uppermost in Tharn's mind was that sense of caution when caution was possible, and he decided to wait for a while before entering the palace itself.

With a quick soundless rush he crossed the stretch of greensward between him and the nearest tree. A single agile leap took him among its branches and, finding a comfortable fork, he settled himself to wait.

Unexpectedly, it proved a wise move. Hardly was he at rest when a group of six guards, their spear-points and white tunics sharp and clear in the light of Uda, the moon, rounded a far corner of the building.

At first Tharn thought some one had sighted him entering the grounds and given an alarm. He abandoned the idea immediately, however, for the actions and general attitude of the six indicated this was no more than a routine patrol. Evidently Ammad's nobleman had many enemies . . .

In a way Tharn's choice of a point to break into this palace was an unfortunate one. He would have preferred to enter on the side where Uda's rays did not reach. But four guards instead of one were stationed at that gate and an attempt to pass them would have been foolhardy at best.

Now, indeed, he must wait—wait until he could learn how much time would elapse between appearances of those six guards. He settled himself firmly into the branch's fork, using this period of enforced idleness by attempting to locate some means of ingress in that section of palace wall visible to him.

All windows of the first two floors appeared to be guarded by slender columns of stone. He had seen such forms of protection on some of Sephar's structures and he knew that even his own great strength would be unable to force them.

The windows of the top two floors were shielded only by drapes of soft material, with here and there a balcony dotting the white stone surface. Could he but reach one of the former, entry would be simple. But nowhere on the smooth sheer surface could he make out hand-and-foot-holds for that purpose.

Half an hour dragged by. Nobody passed by, no light showed at any of the windows, no sound broke the tomb-like silence. He wondered at the failure of the six-man patrol to appear a second time.

Well, he could not remain in this leafy retreat forever. With a slight shrug of his giant shoulders, Tharn descended to the lower branches, took a long and cautious look around, his ears and nose alert for some sign of life. Nothing.

Dropping to the ground, the cave lord ran lightly toward that corner of the palace around which those six guards had disappeared more than half an hour before. He was within feet of his goal when a sudden chorus of shrill cries from behind him broke the silence.

A single glance over his shoulder told him the story. The ground patrol had chosen this particular moment to reappear!

* * *

ONCE Dylara had been thrust not ungrudgingly within a room off a fourth floor corridor and its door barred from the outside, Trakor was turned over to a single guard to be taken to one of the slave dormitories. From the cave youth's appearance of utter hopelessness, the dispirited droop of his shoulders, it was clear all fight had gone out of him since Ammad's gates had closed at his back. He shuffled wearily along the hall ahead of his yawning guard, down a flight of stairs to the third level and along a lengthy corridor, lined with doors and completely deserted at this hour.

At the corridor's far end loomed two massive doors, heavily barred. While Trakor stood passively by, head hanging listlessly, the Ammadian put down his spear and reached with both hands to lift free the broad bar. In so doing he momentarily turned his back to the cave youth—and that momentary lapse spelled his doom.

Steel fingers closed about his throat, a naked leg tripped him up and he was flat on his back before his lips opened to a cry that was never uttered. Blindly the guard sought to reach the knife at his belt; but Trakor, anticipating this, ground a knee into that wrist.

The man's heels hammered spasmodically against the stone in mute agony and fear and his by no means weak body threshed and bucked. But those fingers only tightened their hold.

Trakor, his face only inches from that of the enemy, saw those fear-filled eyes start from their sockets, saw lips and cheeks turn dark with constricted blood, felt the broad chest beneath his rise and fall wildly as the lungs fought for air.

For several minutes after the Ammadian warrior lay limp and still beneath him Trakor kept his fingers buried in that lifeless throat. Finally he rose shakily to his feet and looked

down upon the body of his first kill. Exultation filled him, and pride—and a strange sense of sadness . . .

He shook his head briefly as if to clear away such thoughts. Guided by the dim light from candles in wall brackets set at wide intervals along the corridor, he bent and stripped the corpse of its tunic and drew it over his own shoulders. His late foe had been a tall man and the tunic came a bit higher on Trakor's legs than Ammadian fashion dictated, a grievous matter which he ignored. A keen-edged knife of stone went under the tunic's belt; the heavy spear he left where the warrior originally had placed it.

TRAKOR went back along that corridor with long swinging strides, his naked feet soundless against the stone, his head erect, his ears and eyes alert for the slightest sound or movement.

Ascending the same flight of stairs he had descended a few minutes earlier, he paused at the top and looked carefully at the twin lines of closed doors. The seventh on his left; he had counted them off carefully while on his way to the floor below.

For a full minute he stood motionless outside that barred portal, listening for some indication that others were up and about the palace. Then he turned back, lifted the bar and pushed open the door with slow care.

A flicker of motion from within the darkened room caused him to leap sharply back, just in time to keep a heavy wooden chair from caving in his head. Unchecked, the chair struck the floor with a resounding crash, the impact tearing it loose from Dylara's hands.

By the time she had bent to pick it up for a second try, Trakor was inside and the door closed. He threw out a hand to ward off Dylara's impromptu club, whispering, "No, Dylara! It is I — Trakor!"

A muffled sob of relief and thanksgiving was torn from her throat, then she was in his arms.

At the feel of her body against his, the heady scent of her hair in his nostrils, Trakor felt his heart leap within him and his arms tightened suddenly about the girl's smooth, softly rounded shoulders.

Then the moment was gone and they drew apart.

"I can't believe it, Trakor!" Dylara whispered. "How did you manage to get away?"

"There's no time for that now," he said. "We've got to get out of this place and back to the jungle where we belong. Tharn is out there somewhere and we must find him before he enters Ammad in search of us."

"But how . . ."

"I don't know—yet. If we can reach the streets without being seen . . ." He went to the door, pressed an ear against its planks for a moment, then very gently drew open the heavy section of wood and put his head cautiously out. The corridor, in either direction, was deserted.

"Come," he whispered, and hand in hand they stole silently toward the head of those stairs Trakor had recently climbed.

From somewhere below them a door slammed heavily and sandaled feet, several pairs of them judging from the sound, approached the base of that same flight of steps.

Without speaking Trakor and Dylara turned and, on tiptoe, raced in the opposite direction. As he ran, Trakor drew his knife in preparation for any enemy who might suddenly loom in their path.

A turn in the corridor brought them to a second flight of steps, down which they raced at full speed. Past landings at the third and second floors they fled, stopping at last in front of a closed door marking the main level of the palace.

"Wait!" Trakor breathed, placing

a restraining hand on the girl's arm.

SILENCE seemed to press down upon them, a silence so complete they could hear the breath rustling in their nostrils.

With almost exaggerated care Trakor drew back the door. Moonlight streaming in at several stone-barred windows revealed a large hall, its walls hung with rich tapestries and a long wide table, lined with chairs, running almost its entire length.

Dylara, familiar with such scenes from her days in Sephar, said, "The palace dining hall." She pointed to an open doorway in the opposite wall. "That should lead to the kitchens. No one will be there at this time of night."

"Good!"

They crossed quickly to the designated opening, along a short narrow hall, through a second doorway and on into a low-ceilinged room whose furnishings bore mute testimony that Dylara's guess had been right.

"Look!" whispered Dylara, pointing.

Thin lines of moonlight formed a rectangle on the far wall, marking a doorway leading to open air. Quickly Trakor was across the kitchen and straining to lift the heavy bar from its catches.

And in that moment a sudden chorus of deep-throated shouts of alarm from beyond that door reached their ears.

CHAPTER XII NO DEEPER DUNGEON

JALTOR, king of all Ammad, rose from his chair as his four visitors entered the apartment. Straight and tall he stood, his magnificent body in its purple-edged tunic seeming to dwarf all else within the room.

No one spoke. Curzad, captain of the palace guards, closed the door softly and stood with his back against

it, arms folded and his rugged features empty of all expression.

It was Jotan, son of Garlud, who was the first to speak. The anger that showed in his burning eyes and the thrust of his chin thickened his words until they were more nearly a growl.

"What means this, Jaltor? Why was my party intercepted outside Ammad's walls and dragged here in secrecy? Why are we thus treated like common criminals? I demand an explanation!"

"You may request an explanation, Jotan," Jaltor said calmly. "As Ammad's king I answer no man's demands."

In the strained silence following his words, Jaltor's gaze moved on to where Alurna, daughter of Urim and princess of Sephar, stood staring at him in wonder and uncertainty. His expression softened and when he spoke his voice had lost completely its former edge.

"Curzad has told me of your father's death. We have both suffered a great loss, for Urim was my brother—my only brother. Later I should like to know the details of his passing; but first I wish to explain my reasons for what has happened tonight."

There were mixed emotions evident in the expressions of his listeners. Tamar was clearly worried and puzzled, Javan appeared even more dazed and uncomprehending than usual, while Jotan was close to bursting with outright anger and injured pride.

Jaltor indicated chairs with a wave of his hand. "Be seated, please. This may take some time."

They obeyed in silence, and even though sitting none of them was relaxed. Jaltor remained on his feet, legs spread, his keen eyes somber.

"A little less than half a moon ago," Jaltor began, "an attempt was made to assassinate me. The reason it was not successful lay in the peculiar clumsiness of the assassin. He was

captured immediately and put to torture in an effort to learn the names of others, if any, involved in the plot. He was an old man, strangely enough, and before he died he told me who had hired him."

"I don't see," Jotan burst out, "what this has to do with any of us. Certainly we are not involved."

"The name he gave," Jaltor went on, as though there had been no interruption, "was Garlud!"

In the sudden, shocked silence that followed the measured tread of a guard in the corridor outside came clearly through the closed door.

"I don't believe it!" Jotan shouted. He leaped from his chair to face the monarch "Ever since I can remember you and my father were the closest of friends!"

"And long before that Jotan," Jaltor said quietly.

"Yet because some common killer gave his name, you believe such an impossible story? My father could have no reason for wanting you dead. What have you done to him?"

JALTOR ignored the last question.

He said in the same quiet voice: "Not a common killer, Jotan. It was old Heglar who so named your father."

The young Ammadian nobleman fell back a pace in complete amazement. "Old Heglar? Why, he wouldn't . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Exactly. Heglar would not lie."

Jotan lifted a shaking hand to rub his forehead in a kind of dazed helplessness that struck to the heart of every person in the room. "No," he said, his voice suddenly loud, "I do not believe it. Where is my father? Let me talk to him."

"Where," Jaltor said coldly, "would apt to be any man who plotted the death of Ammad's king?"

Slowly Jotan's hand fell from before his eyes as the meaning of those chill words came home to him. "You

—you *killed* him? Garlud? My father? Your friend?"

Nothing altered in Jaltor's sober expression—and in that Jotan read his answer. With a strangely inarticulate snarl he launched himself at the king, seeking to lock his fingers in that deeply tanned neck.

Curzad leaped from his place at the door, brushing past the paralyzed onlookers, and reached out to engulf the crazed young nobleman in his strong arms. Jotan, helpless in that iron grip was borne back, tears of rage and frustration streaming from his eyes.

Jaltor raised a steady hand to his bruised throat, his expression unchanged. "Confine him in the pits, Curzad. Later I shall decide what is to be done with him."

Tamar started up from his chair in angry protest. "What kind of justice is this?" he cried. "Will you send a man to his death because grief causes him to—?" He stopped there, stricken into abrupt silence by what he saw in the ruler's eyes.

It took the combined efforts of Curzad and two of the corridor guards to subdue Jotan sufficiently to get him out of the room and on his way to the pits. When the room was quiet again, Jaltor dropped into an empty chair across from Alurna and the two young noblemen.

"Now," he said, "I can tell you the whole story."

And tell them he did, from start to finish. "So you see," he summed up, "why Jotan must be kept captive. Had I told him the truth nothing would have satisfied him until his father was freed and another method used to force the real accomplice into the open. When this unknown conspirator learns that Jotan's party has returned from Sephar, apparently without Jotan himself, he is going to be more puzzled than ever. A puzzled man makes mistakes—which is what we want him to do."

Alurna shuddered. "But the pits! If they are like the ones beneath Sephar, you are punishing terribly two men who are innocent of wrongdoing."

"You must understand," Jaltor reminded her, "that the possibility exists that Garlud is guilty. I have lived long enough to know that ambition can drive the noblest of men to ignoble acts. Old Heglar's dying words cannot be lightly dismissed."

"You," he continued, nodding to Tamar and Javan, "are free to return to your homes. Should anyone ask what has happened to the leader of your party, tell him that—well, that the lions got him. That will fit in with what happened during the night that you were attacked by Sadu."

The two young noblemen rose to leave, greatly relieved by Jaltor's explanation, but still concerned. After they were gone, the monarch said to Alurna:

"I know you must be worn out from your long journey from Sephar. But sit there a little longer, if you will, and tell me the circumstances of my brother's death."

IT required the better part of an hour for the dark-haired princess to relate what had taken place in Sephar nearly three moons before. She spoke often of Jotan during the account, and the tenderness in her eyes at mention of his name told Ammad's king more than she realized. And when she told of Dylara's disappearance and the possibility that Sadu had devoured her, Jaltor caught the unconscious satisfaction in her tone.

For a little while after she had finished, Jaltor sat staring thoughtfully into his wine goblet. Then: "Urim's mistake was to coddle that rascally high priest. In Ammad the priesthood is no problem at all; we keep them few in numbers and with no power to create unrest. Long ago I put a stop to the Games honoring the God-Whose

Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken-Aloud . . . Perhaps some day I shall find a means of avenging the cowardly assassination of Urim, your father and my brother."

He smiled gravely into her eyes. "Do not worry about Jotan, my princess. Soon, I hope, he will be free again and you shall have your chance to win him."

Alurna's gray-green eyes flashed momentarily. . . and then she too smiled. "Ammad's king is a wise and understanding man," she murmured.

Jaltor straightened and put down his goblet. "And now I shall show you to the suite of rooms which I ordered made ready for your use. Come."

FOR A long time after the slave woman detailed to serve her had gone, Alurna lay wide-eyed on the soft bed. Moonlight through the room's wide window formed a solid square on the floor, and in its ghostly radiance the furnishings seemed shadowy and unreal.

It was the first bed she had been in for a long, long time and sleep should have come to her the moment she touched the pillow. But too many thoughts raced through her mind to permit sleep—thoughts jumbled and confused.

Ever since Jotan had rejoined the main body of his men after his unsuccessful search for Dylara, he had been moody and distraught. Those warriors who had accompanied him and Tamar on the hunt seemed confident—out of Jotan's hearing!—that the jungle had gotten her, just as it had claimed the lives of countless others.

And now that the way was clear to win him, Alurna slipped easily into a new role—a role of silent understanding and ready sympathy. Slowly and unconsciously Jotan had begun to respond to treatment. It might take several moons, she realized, before he would begin to look upon her as a de-

sirable woman in addition to a warm-hearted and friendly companion. But she could wait—for many moons if necessary.

Now the intrigue of some unknown enemy of Jotan's father had given the young nobleman new worries. If only there was some way to help him—some method by which she might earn his gratitude. Gratitude, she knew, was an excellent base on which to build romance.

Somewhere in the bowels of this very building Jotan and his father lay in dark, damp cells, put there on the orders of her own uncle. As king of Amnad and brother of her father he was entitled to her loyalty and respect. But when it came to the point of choosing between Jaltor and Jotan . . . there was no doubt in her mind as to her ultimate decision!

As she lay there on her back, her eyes fixed unseeingly on the ceiling beams, a plan began to shape itself in her mind—a plan which, as details took concrete form, brought a faint smile to her lips.

And still smiling, Alurna fell asleep . . .

* * *

AS THE Ammadian patrol bore down upon him with leveled spears, Tharn's blackwood bow seemed to leap into his hands and two arrows flashed across the intervening space. Two of the warriors toppled and died under those flint arrow heads, but before the cave lord could release a third he was forced to leap hastily aside to prevent impalement by three thrown spears. So narrow the distance now that his bow was useless, and so he tore his knife from its place at its belt and, with the silent ferocity of a charging lion, hurled himself upon the remaining four guards.

Two more of the Ammadians collapsed in death, their heads almost sev-

ered as polished flint tore into their throats. The remaining pair, upon seeing that and hearing the beastial snarls issuing from that broad chest, drew back sharply, wavering on the verge of outright flight.

Tharn, sensing their indecision, tensed to renew his charge and put them to rout.

A cacophony of loud shouts from behind him told of the arrival of reinforcements. There were eight of them this time, still a good thirty yards away but fast approaching.

Instantly Tharn, his knife sweeping high for a thrust, lunged at the remaining two warriors who turned and fled a short distance before circling back to join the second group. Tharn stopped, caught up his bow and brought down three more of the enemy as he began a slow withdrawal. Lights were beginning to show from some of the palace windows; at any moment an arrow from above might strike him down.

Suddenly a door in the palace wall burst open and a white-tunicked figure came bounding across the lawn toward him. Tharn's bow was on its way into position to send an arrow leaping to meet this new attack when a familiar voice called out his name.

"Trakor!" Tharn shouted, astonished.

The boy bent while still running and caught up a spear from beside the body of one of Tharn's victims. Hardly had he reached the cave lord's side when a third group of palace guards appeared on the scene from behind them.

Cut off in two directions by enemies, blocked in another by the palace itself, Tharn chose the only possible avenue of escape.

"To the wall!" he shouted, then wheeled and raced across the greensward with long flashing strides, Trakor close at his heels.

Angling in sharply from two directions, the Ammadians sought to

overtake them. Several spears were hurled but the distance was too great.

Trakor, seeing the high walls, knew it would be impossible to scale them in the few moments before the Am-madians arrived. But his faith in the cave lord remained unshaken; if a way to freedom could be found, Tharn would find it!

WHILE still a few feet short of the wall, Tharn swerved sharply to the left, crashed through a thick growth of bushes and paused in front of a small gate. Even as Trakor was about to point out the futility of trying to force a way through those stubborn planks, Tharn drew open the barrier and leaped through.

Trakor, stricken dumb with astonishment at this new development, followed him into the street as Tharn slammed shut the gate and dropped its bar into place a split second before a heavy shoulder thudded against its opposite side.

What promised to be at least a breathing space died in its infancy as a full dozen of the white-tunicked fighting men of Vokal's guard appeared at the juncture of streets to their left, and catching sight of them, came tearing along the pavement in their direction.

"This way," Tharn said, and the two cave men raced into the night.

For nearly a quarter-hour the two Cro-Magnards fled through the black labyrinth of Ammad's streets, twisting and turning to throw off pursuit. Twice they encountered patrols from other estates along their erratic pathway, but an arrow or two from Tharn's deadly bow drove them off.

Finally the two men slowed to a walk, their feet soundless against the stone surface of a narrow street between two walls in which no gates were visible. For the moment at least, it appeared their hunters had lost them, thus giving them a chance to gauge their present position.

Judging from the way this particular street slanted upward ahead of them they were on one of Ammad's hills. Further along a huge building loomed against the night sky from squarely across their path—a building larger and higher than any they had seen thus far.

"Dylara is back there," Trakor said abruptly.

Tharn nodded without looking around. "I know," he said simply. "We must find some place to hole up until another night comes. Then I am going back for her."

"We were close to getting away—Dylara and I," Trakor said ruefully. "We were on the verge of stepping out into the open when I heard the guards attacking you."

"You were that close to freedom?" Tharn asked, surprised.

Briefly Trakor recounted what had taken place in Vokal's palace. When he had finished, Tharn shook his head in savage disgust. "That makes the second time she was almost within arm's reach of me! I suppose by this time they have her again and she is locked away."

"Perhaps," Trakor admitted. "When I saw who it was Vokal's guards were after, I gave her my knife and she crawled under one of the tables to wait for us until we had killed the guards and could come back to get her." He laughed shortly, bitterly. "We *would* have killed them, Tharn, if so many hadn't come to their aid."

"It is always thus," the cave lord said philosophically. "Tomorrow night we shall try again."

WHILE talking, they continued on up the steep rise. Now their way was blocked by the wall they had glimpsed a few moments before. A narrow roadway skirted its base in two directions, and to the right, several hundred yards distant, they could make out the faint yellow rays

of a lantern above a recessed gate.

"What now?" Trakor asked shortly.

Tharn shrugged. "A tree with foliage so thick none can see us. Judging from the size of the building beyond this wall, its grounds should contain many trees. Let us enter and see if we can find one large enough for our purpose."

Trakor glanced doubtfully up at the wall's edge fully fifteen feet from the ground. "Do we go over it or through one of the gates?"

"Over it. We dare not risk arousing the guards."

"How can we reach its top?"

In answer Tharn took up a position with his back only an inch or two from the wall. Cupping his hands together in front of him, he bent his knees slightly, keeping his back straight. "Extend your arms above your head," he directed, "and place your right foot in my hands, crouching a little while I support your weight. That way I can toss you high enough to enable your hands to catch the wall's edge."

Trakor nodded, a shade doubtfully, and followed directions. Like a striking snake Tharn uncoiled his bent legs with a sharp upward thrust, at the same instant jerking his locked hands up to chest level.

The youth shot upward like an arrow from a bow. Tharn heard a dull thud, followed by a low exclamation of pain. He looked up to see Trakor sitting astride the wall rubbing one of his shins.

At Tharn's instructions, Trakor lay chest down against the wall's top and extended his right hand downward. The cave lord backed away, then ran forward and leaped high, catching Trakor's fingers and swinging lightly up beside him.

There were trees—many of them—singly and in groups, their branches heavy with leaves. The grounds in which they stood were immense, with winding paths of crushed stone, wind-

ing between bushes heavy with jungle blooms. Here and there concealed jets flung graceful and shimmering curtains of water skyward, the falling drops pattering musically into stone-lined pools. In the distance loomed the gleaming white walls of a palace that, Tharn realized, was easily three times the size of any he had seen in Sephar.

Lightly the two men dropped to the closely clipped grass. Tharn would have liked to remain aloft for a minute or two, to drink in the beauty of the scene and to get some idea of just where within Ammad they were. But should some sleepless Ammadian be standing at a window in that palace, he could hardly keep from seeing those two figures atop the wall.

Side by side the two cave men strode lightly toward a cluster of eight trees arranged in a small circle.

While from the depths of a thicket of bushes bordering one of the garden pools a pair of eyes watched them in startled wonder.

* * *

Dylara crouched beneath a table in Vokal's kitchen and listened to that nobleman's strident voice as it lashed at a group of palace guards outside the half open door.

"Do you expect me to believe," he said hotly, "that a single warrior could slay seven of you? Were their muscles turned to water at sight of him? And the rest of you—are you soldiers or children to be so easily outwitted?"

No one attempted a reply. Ekbar, captain of the guards, stood stiffly by, beads of nervous perspiration dotting his forehead. His turn would come once Vokal was through with the guards themselves. He would be fortunate indeed to escape with no more than a tongue-lashing; he might well end up being demoted in rank.

"Who was this man?" Vokal demanded. "Did any of you recognize him? Speak up, before I order your

tongues cut out with your own knives! You!" He pointed a finger at one of the men. "I understand you were one of those who first saw him. Who was he?"

The designated man, his trembling voice matching the shaking of his knees, said hurriedly, "He was like no warrior I have seen in all Ammad, Most-High. He was very tall, with great rippling muscles that - -"

"Enough!" Vokal shouted. "I might have known you would claim no ordinary man could best the lot of you. And, I suppose, at least fifty more of these huge strangers fell upon you?"

"No, Most-High," the warrior admitted. "But there was one more, not quite so large as the first. He came from within the palace to join his friend and the two of them ran - -"

"Wait!" the nobleman said sharply. "Are you sure this second man came from *inside* the palace?"

"Yes, Most-High." He pointed an unsteady hand at the door leading to the palace kitchen. "He came from there. With my own eye I - -"

"Enough!" Vokal wheeled toward the captain of his guard. "Ekbar, send a detail to comb every room of the palace. There may be more of these strange intruders in there."

"At once, Most-High."

Dylara, listening from her place of concealment within the kitchen, knew she dared stay there no longer. A moment from now the room would be swarming with armed men and she was sure to be found. It was unfortunate she could not have accompanied Trakor when he raced out to Tharn's assistance, but she had known then, as now, that she would only have slowed their dash for freedom. With Tharn and Trakor both at liberty within Ammad's walls, they would eventually find a way to rescue her.

There was no point, however, in waiting around to be rescued. If she

could make her way beyond Ammad's walls without help, so much the better.

Rising from her hiding place, the stone knife Trakor had given her ready in one sun-tanned fist, she crossed the kitchen with stealthy swiftness and hurried along the short hall leading to the palace dining hall.

It proved to be empty of life, although she could hear the sounds of sandaled feet entering the room she had only just quitted. Quickly she crossed the huge chamber, carefully drew open the same door she and Trakor had passed through a short time earlier, and raced lightly back up the stairs there to the building's second floor.

AT the landing, she stopped and pressed an ear against the planks of the corridor door. She could hear no sound from beyond them to indicate someone was there. Carefully, inch by inch, she drew it inward until there was space enough for her to peer through.

Not ten feet away from her were the broad backs of two guards!

Despite the pounding of her heart and the almost uncontrollable efforts of her feet to break into instant flight, Dylara very slowly allowed the heavy door to return to its closed position. Then she was away, racing upward on the balls of her feet, silent as the shadow of a shadow.

She did not even pause at the third landing, for her quick ears caught the tread of feet beyond its closed door. At the fourth level the stairs ended at the corridor itself, with no door to mask them.

Fortunately the long hallway was deserted. Dylara turned to her right and hurried along, ears and eyes alert for the first sign that she was not alone. Past a score of doors and around several corners the corridor led and in all that time she encountered no one.

It seemed very still here on the fourth level of Vokal's palace. The almost eerie silence seemed to press down upon her spirits like some weighty and invisible hand. She could hear her heart pounding and the whisper of her breathing. The floor underfoot was now covered with a thick carpeting of some woven material and her sandals pressed soundlessly into it.

She had reached a point only a few yards from another bend in the hall ahead of her when she caught the faint sound of voices in that direction—voices which seemed to be growing louder.

Instantly she whirled to retrace her steps, then halted again. It was a long way back to where the corridor had last jogged; the owners of those voices might come into view before she could reach it.

There was a door in one wall almost even with where she stood now. It might open onto a room filled with guards, or it might not open at all. There was no time to weigh her chances.

She released the latch and pushed lightly against the wood.

She came into a large, low-ceilinged room, lighted by candles in beautifully carved wooden brackets affixed to the walls. Polished tables and luxuriously covered chairs stood about the carpeted floor. A door stood slightly open in one of the side walls, disclosing the foot of a wide bed, the covers rumpled as though some one had been sleeping there moments before. Several windows open and unbarred, permitted a panoramic view of a large section of Ammad, and one of them came all the way down to the floor to permit entry to a small balcony.

As Dylara stood there, drinking in the beauty of the room, voices sounded suddenly loud and clear from just outside the door. A moment later the latch moved under an unseen hand

and the door itself swung wide. But even as the latch moved, Dylara was across the room, through the balcony entrance and crouching there, out of sight.

"...one, then call me immediately."

"As the noble Vokal commands."

The silver-haired nobleman closed the door, muttered something under his breath, and crossed to where an earthen jug of wine stood on one of the tables. He filled a goblet to the brim, drained it with a flourish, blew out all but one of the candles and went into the bedroom.

Dylara swallowed her heart back to its usual place and straightened slowly to ease cramped muscles. Give the Ammadian an hour to fall into a deep sleep and to allow the palace inhabitants to return to their beds, and she could make a second attempt to get away.

The minutes passed with almost painful deliberateness. So complete was the silence here that she could hear the sounds of even breathing from the bedroom. It was the breathing of a man who was sleeping soundly; a few minutes more and she would make her bid for freedom.

Knuckles pounded sharply on the apartment door.

* * *

AS Tharn and Trakor were on the point of swinging into one of the half circle of trees, a crepitant rustle among the nearby bushes brought their heads sharply around in instant alarm.

Six stern-faced guards in spotless tunics stood less than a dozen feet away, spears leveled at the broad chests of the two Cro-Magnards. At sight of those weapons Tharn's hand dropped from the hilt of his knife and utter chagrin filled his heart.

He felt Trakor stiffen beside him and he put out a restraining hand. "It is useless," he muttered. "The slightest move and they will cut us down."

One of the six stepped forward a few paces and peered at the two intruders. "Who are you," he demanded, "and what are you doing on the grounds of Jaltor, king of Ammad?"

"We are men of Sephar," Tharn said, following the first line of thought that popped into his head. "We came to Ammad with Jotan's party and were looking over the palace grounds. There is nothing so fine in all Sephar, let me tell you!"

It was a wild, almost incredible shot into complete supposition. It was possible that Jotan and his men *had* reached Ammad by this time; and, while less possible, it was conceivable that the young nobleman had come straight to the palace to pay his respects to Jaltor, instead of postponing the visit until the following day.

What Tharn did not know, of course, was that Jotan's entire party had been met outside Ammad's gates by a force of Jaltor's own guard and brought directly to the palace and were being held there until the king got around to ordering their release.

The officer in charge of this patrol knew all that—as did most of the palace guard. He looked searchingly at the two men for a moment, then said:

"You are lying! Every member of Jotan's party is already under guard. Come with us; we shall allow Curzad to hear your story."

He made a small motion with his hand and instantly Tharn and Trakor were surrounded by a ring of spear points. Side by side the two cave men strode toward the palace, helpless to resist.

Within the huge building they were led to a guard room on the first floor, and after a few minutes the tall, broad-shouldered figure of Jaltor's captain, sharp-eyed and alert, entered the room.

He listened to the officer repeat what Tharn had said outside, then ran his gaze slowly over the two men.

"You are not warriors of Sephar," he growled. "You are not even Ammadians. I have seen your kind before. What are two cave men doing inside Ammad?"

Tharn shrugged but said nothing. Trakor, observing his reaction, followed his lead.

"Perhaps a few days in the pits will loosen your tongues!" Curzad said harshly.

Still no reply.

"As you wish," Curzad turned away indifferently. "To the deepest pits with them, Atkor," he said to the officer. "After a few suns I will see them again to learn if they feel more talkative."

JUST how many downward sloping ramps they trod on the way to the pits Tharn had no way of knowing. Further and further below the earth's surface they went, their hands bound behind them, while brightly lighted subterranean corridors gave way to others only faintly illuminated. Finally even the faint light disappeared and they moved, heavily guarded, through blackness relieved only by flames from a torch carried by one of the guards. There was the clearly audible trickling of water along the stone walls and several times Tharn felt his feet sink to the ankles in cold pools that had formed in hollows of the stone flooring.

At last the wearying procession of sloping ramps ceased and they moved along a level corridor. On either side Tharn made out heavy wooden doors with apertures in their surfaces closed off by columns of stone in the form of bars. Now and then light from the torch picked out white, heavily bearded faces containing white-ringed eyes and expressions of dull hopelessness. Not once, however, did he hear sounds from the throats of those prisoners—only the mute despair of lost souls peering into nothingness.

Finally the officer ordered a halt.

At his command two of the doors, almost directly across from each other, were opened. Tharn felt the cold touch of flint as a knife cut away his bonds, a strong hand thrust him roughly into the cell on the right and the door banged shut behind him.

He turned back and looked out through the bars, to see Trakor, head held proudly erect, shoved into the opposite room. Bars at the top and bottom of each door were drawn into place, a sharp order rang out and the Ammadian guards started back for the surface.

"Curzad said 'to the deepest pits!'" one of them chuckled. "There are no deeper dungeons than those!"

CHAPTER XIII SITAB'S MISTAKE

AS the sound of knocking rang through Vokal's private apartment, Dylara, crouching on the small balcony off the central room, felt her spirits plummet to a new low. Given another few minutes of grace and she would have been out of this cul-de-sac and on her way to freedom.

Again came the knock, louder this time. She heard a muttered exclamation from the bedroom, then Vokal, tying the belt of his tunic, crossed quickly to the corridor door.

"What do you want? Who it is?" he called, impatience strong in his usually calm voice.

"Your pardon, Most-High," said a humble-sounding voice, "but a visitor, bearing your personal talisman, insists on seeing you at once."

"It must be that fool Sitab," Dylara heard the nobleman mutter. He threw open the door, then stepped back suddenly as the cloaked form of a woman pushed her way into the room.

"Rhoa!" he gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"I want to talk to you. Send the guard away and close the door." Her voice, deep for a woman, sounded

muffled through the folds of cloak shielding her face.

Vokal obeyed, and when the door was shut she slipped from the wrap and dropped it across the back of a nearby chair.

She was a woman past thirty, taller than average and beautifully formed. Her hair was a dull black and she wore it long, framing the delicate features of her olive-skinned face. Her eyes were large and very black and at this moment there was anger in them.

"What are you doing here?" Vokal said again.

"It is fairly simple," she said imperiously. "I am tired of waiting, Vokal. For half a moon now old Heglar has been missing. I do not doubt for a moment but that he is dead. Why should we delay this thing any longer. You promised me that once the old fool was dead I could take my rightful place as your mate. I say the time for that is now!"

"But you don't understand, Rhoa. To acknowledge our love now would play directly into Jaltor's hands. Once our names are linked together he will realize Heglar attempted to assassinate him because I hired him to do so."

"I have given this a great deal of thought," Rhoa said coldly, "and I think you're being overly cautious. Let the good people of Ammad talk; the mere fact that we take no trouble to conceal our love will prove to them you had no hand in old Heglar's disappearance."

"You're not making sense!" Vokal cried. "The minute Jaltor hears we are together he will put enough of the threads in place to see the real picture. He will guess that it was I who hired Heglar to attempt that mock assassination in an effort to usurp Garlud's position in Ammad."

He threw his hands wide in a gesture of despair. "In the name of the God," he pleaded, "don't upset everything this short of success! Go back

to your home, Rhoa. Give me a few suns—seven; no more than seven—and I promise you I will have things worked out the way we both want them. Do this for me because I love you and you love me and we can be together without fear of Jaltor.”

“How can you know seven days will be time enough?” she asked doubtfully.

“In a few minutes I am expecting a visit from Sitab, a high-ranking guard of Jaltor’s court,” he explained. “He is in my employ, secretly, and will do as I wish. I shall instruct him to learn if Heglar and Garlud are held in the pits beneath Jaltor’s palace. If they are, he will arrange the deaths of both; if they are not there we can assume both are already dead and act accordingly. But first I must *know*, Rhoa.”

SHE stood there, erect and beautiful in the shimmering radiance of candle light, indecision plain in her face. “When will this man Sitab get the information for you?”

“Tonight! Between the hour I discuss the problem with him and the hour of dawn. You will do this my way, Rhoa?”

A discreet knock at the door interrupted her reply. Vokal, sudden alarm plain in his face, stiffened. “Who is there?”

“The guard, Most-High,” said a voice, muffled by the planks. “A second visitor, who refused to give his name, awaits your pleasure.”

“It is Sitab,” Vokal told the woman, whispering. “Will you give me those seven suns, Rhoa? Will you go now, and be patient for that long? What is your answer?”

Abruptly she nodded. “Seven suns, Vokal. But no more than seven.”

His breath of relief was clearly audible. “Good!” He went to the door and drew the bar. “Hide your face so that none may know who you are. Goodbye.”

He drew open the heavy door and the woman, her face concealed by the folds of her heavy cloak, swept regally through, past the staring guard and a short, barrel-chested man in the tunic of a guard of Jaltor’s court.

Vokal, his handsome face completely without expression, crooked a finger at the latter. “Enter, my friend,” he said cordially. “You have arrived at exactly the right time.”

SHORTLY after arriving at the palace of his father, following the surprising interview with Jaltor, ruler of Ammad, Tamar had gone to his room and his bed.

But not to sleep. His thoughts were of his friend Jotan and the trouble that had befallen the young Ammadian noble. Tamar never doubted Garlud’s innocence and he longed to take some action that would clear both father and son. In keeping with Jaltor’s instructions he had told his own father nothing of what had taken place, letting him think Jotan had died beneath the claws and fangs of Sadu, the lion.

After more than two hours of fitful tossing, Tamar rose from his bed and entered the living room of his suite. He was standing at one of the windows overlooking sleeping Sephar, when a discreet knock at the door startled him out of his reverie.

“Who is there?” he called.

“The corridor guard,” said an apologetic voice. “A young woman wishes to speak with you, noble Tamar. Upon an urgent matter, she says.”

Tamar crossed the room quickly and unbarred the door. Beyond the stalwart figure of the guard was the softly curved form of a woman whose hair was very black and who, despite the folds of a cloak held to shadow her face, seemed young and beautiful.

...

“Alurna!” Tamar gasped incredulously. “What are you doing here?”

She shook her head warningly, en-

tered and waited until Tamar had closed the door. The nobleman helped her remove the cloak and she sank down on a nearby stool.

"I thought you would be sleeping," she said, smiling a little.

Trouble clouded his fine eyes. "I could not sleep," he said huskily. "I tried. But I keep thinking . . ."

"Of Jotan," the girl finished. "And his father. We must help them, Tamar. We must not leave them to rot in the pits of Ammad."

"But what can we do?"

"Do you know how to reach the pits without being seen?"

He stared at her. "What difference would that make?"

"Why can't we free them, Tamar? Give them a chance to learn who is behind the plot against them." She leaned toward him, her face set with determined lines. "My uncle, it seems, is content to let them suffer until time works out the problem of who is guilty. I say Jotan and his father should be allowed to do something themselves to hurry matters!"

"But there's no way . . ."

"Are you sure? Have you thought about it before this?"

He hesitated. "No-o. But it could mean imprisonment for us if we fail, Alurna. Jaltor can be completely ruthless; if he learned we were attempting to interfere with his way of doing things . . . well it could be too bad for us."

Color crept into her cheeks but she met his eyes resolutely. "Jotan means enough to me to risk that," she said flatly. "Do *you* feel that way?"

He rose and began to pace the floor. "You're right. Let me think. There *is* an entrance to the corridors housing the pits of Jaltor's palace, an entrance supposedly secret, which Jotan himself once pointed out to me."

He wheeled suddenly and entered his sleeping quarters, returning a moment later with a flint knife in a sheath at his belt and there was the

light of battle in his eyes.

"Return to your room, Alurna," he said grimly. "I will go to free Jotan and his men."

She shook her head. "This was my idea and I'm going with you."

"But—but this is dangerous! If I am caught I shall be thrown in the pits myself—perhaps killed. This *is* no venture for a woman!"

"It is a venture for *this* woman," she replied doggedly. "Jotan *is* to be my mate . . . even though he may not realize that yet. He must find me beside you when we rescue him."

For a long moment they stared into each other's eyes—then Tamar's shoulder rose and fell in surrender.

"As you wish," he said.

SITAB, warrior of the palace of Jaltor, moved stealthily down a steep ramp. About him was darkness more intense than that of a tomb, forcing him to feel his way with infinite slowness lest a misstep make a noise loud enough to rouse one or more of the guards in the arms-rooms here and there among the subterranean corridors.

From one of his hands trailed a heavy spear; in the other was a keen-edged knife of flint ready for the first man who should find him where Sitab had no right to be.

For whoever he came across now must die. It would not do for word to reach Jaltor on the morrow that Sitab, a trusted guard, had been seen on his way to the pits.

A miasmic odor of damp decay seemed to increase in strength the further below the earth's surface he progressed. Now and then a water rat would rustle across his path, its passage marked only by the rasp of claws on rock. Damp stretches of slippery surface proved difficult to negotiate and on several occasions he saved himself from falling only by a quick movement of his feet. Now and then he would step into ankle-

deep pools of chill water, bringing an involuntary gasp to his lips.

At long last his feet found no ramp where one should have been and he realized he now stood at the beginning of the deepest corridor beneath the palace. For a long moment he stood there, his ears straining to catch some sound of life. As from a great distance he caught the muffled snores of sleeping men, the faint murmurings of troubled words from a mind dreaming of the horrors to which it awakened after each sleep.

Grasping his spear tighter, Sitab inched his way cautiously along the corridor until his ears told him he was standing between twin rows of cells. From the belt of his robe he drew a small length of tinder-like wood and from a pouch in the same belt came a small ball-like bit of stone, its interior hollowed to hold a supply of moss in the center of which glowed a single coal of fire. Drawing the perforated bit of wood serving as a cork, Sitab let the bit of fire roll out onto the miniature torch. It rested there, glowing redly as he breathed against it. When a minute of this had gone by a tiny tongue of fire rose to life and within seconds the torch was fully lighted, dispelling the ink-like gloom about him.

On silent feet Sitab moved from door to door of the cells. At each barred opening he let the rays of light seep into the tiny interior of the room beyond while his eyes sought to identify the sleeping men.

Some he saw were hardly recognizable as human, so long had they lain prisoner in this awful hole. Matted hair hung over faces so thin and emaciated as hardly to be human at all. Others he saw were still in excellent physical condition: these had been here only a little while.

But none was familiar to him until he was well down the first row. As he peered into this particular cell, he saw a man lying asleep on the bare

stone platform which served this cell, as in others, as a crude bunk. The sleeper's face was turned toward the wall, shadowed by a raised arm, so that Sitab was unable to make out the features. But something was familiar about the man's general build and the shape of his head, and for several minutes Sitab stood there waiting for the man to stir in his sleep sufficiently for his face to be seen.

When full five minutes had passed without this taking place, Sitab broke a small piece of the rotting wood from his torch and flipped it unerringly through the barred grating of the door. It struck lightly against the bare arm of the sleeper, and he sighed heavily, stirred, then turned his face toward the light.

Sitab stiffened, waiting for the man to awake and cry out in alarm at the glare of the torch. But the eyes did not open and the prisoner lapsed back into complete slumber. Only then did Sitab see who lay sleeping there.

It was Jotan.

A slight gasp escaped the guard's lips. Jotan *here!* But Jotan was dead! Vokal himself had said as much.

Sitab smiled. No matter that Vokal had been misinformed; Jotan would be dead within seconds. Vokal would reward him well for killing both Jotan *and* Garlud—if the latter were imprisoned here as well.

How best to kill him? Open the door, creep to the side of the sleeping man and plunge the spearhead into his heart? That would be the quietest way . . . and also the most dangerous. What if Jotan were in reality awake—lying there waiting for this unknown visitor to enter the cell, then jumping upon him in a bid for freedom.

A glance at those muscles, even though apparently relaxed in sleep, was enough to give him his decision.

Lifting his spear, he thrust its point between the bars of the door, aimed it squarely at Jotan's exposed chest—and tensed his muscles to launch the heavy weapon.

CHAPTER XIV

AMBUSH

FOR a long time after Sitab was gone, Vokal remained seated on a low bench in the living room of his apartment. Worry was crowding in on his mind, the ambition that had led him into discrediting Garlud was proving itself a curse, and his love for Rhoea, wife of old Heglar, was now a burdensome thing that had cost him a thousand tals and might end up costing him his life.

Well, the die was cast now; there was no turning back. Dawn was no more than two or three hours away; long before Dyta's golden rays flooded Ammad's streets Sitab should have returned with word that Heglar and Garlud were dead. Everything depended on that now—it was still not too late to recoup, winning back his thousand tals and a higher place in Ammad's society.

The silver-haired nobleman rose from his chair and reached for the candle to blow out its flame. A few hour's sleep would make him better able to face the morrow . . .

. . . From her place on the narrow balcony of the nobleman's apartment, Dylara watched the candle flame perish under the man's exhalation. This time, she thought, I will not wait so long for him to fall asleep. She watched him cross the room and disappear from sight into the sleeping quarters beyond, waited for the space of a hundred heartbeats to be sure he would not come into this room again, then very slowly, her heart in her mouth, she began to move with extreme stealth across the floor toward the corridor door.

The journey seemed to take hours although two minutes were all that passed before she reached out to remove the heavy bar Vokal had dropped into place when his last guest was gone. With trembling fingers she set the thick length of wood against the stone flooring and slowly swung the door open a crack.

Light gleamed dully from down the corridor. With great care she widened the distance between the door's edge and its frame. When the space was large enough, she put her head out cautiously and looked along the corridor.

Standing there, watching her with wide eyes, was one of the palace guards!

Shock held both Dylara and the guard momentarily paralyzed—then Dylara, the first to recover, was into the corridor and running swiftly in the opposite direction.

Behind her she heard the guard shout a command. But before he could do more, she was around a bend in the corridor and racing toward the stairs she knew were further along . . .

. . . Vokal, not yet completely asleep, leaped from his bed at sound of a sudden hoarse cry from outside his apartment. When he arrived at the open door—a door he had only moments before barred from inside—he found a knot of palace guards already assembled there.

"What has happened?" he demanded sharply.

The man regularly stationed outside his door explained in a few words.

Vokal's cheeks paled at the full implication of what had occurred came to him. Whoever this mystery woman was, she had overheard—*must* have overheard—his conversations with both Rhoea and Sitab. Were she a spy—someone who would go to Jaltor with what she had heard—Vokal was a dead man!

"Find her!" he screamed. "A hundred tals to the man who brings her alive, to me. Death to all of you unless she is found! Go!"

They went as though the hounds of hell were at their heels. Within seconds every floor of the palace was alight with torches, every hall crowded with warriors, every room being searched. Guards at the palace gates were alerted, patrols were set to scouring the grounds between palace and outer wall.

There was no sign of the missing girl.

THARN, sleeping soundly as a man does whose conscience is clear and whose bed is no more uncomfortable than a hundred others he has occupied, awakened suddenly. For a brief moment he lay without moving, his ears searching for some indication of what had awakened him.

There! The barest whisper of leather against stone from down the corridor than ran past his cell door. A sandaled foot had made that sound. Other ears—even the ears of a man already awake—would have missed what his sleeping brain had caught.

Soundlessly he left his stone bench and moved to the door. But the darkness was such that even his unbelievably sharp eyes were helpless to penetrate it. But if his eyes were useless, his ears were not. Fifty feet further down the corridor a man was standing; he could hear his breathing and the rustle of garments. A few seconds later Tharn's eyes caught a tiny glow of light—a glow that soon swelled to a flickering light strong enough for him to see the opposite row of barred cell doors.

Again came the whisper of sandaled feet. Presently an Ammadian guard came into view, a heavy spear in one hand, a small torch of flaming wood in the other. The guard was peering into each of the cells across from Tharn, pausing at length at

some, passing others quickly. Tharn wondered at the man's attempt at stealth; since it was impossible for any of the prisoners to get at him, such precautions could serve no evident ends.

When the man reached a cell almost exactly across from Tharn, the cave man saw him toss something through the opening framing the bars. He heard the unseen prisoner sigh . . . and then the guard raised his spear and inserted its head through the same opening.

Tharn was on the point of crying out a warning, his reason dictated only by a desire to thwart as far as possible the hated symbol of authority represented by this white-tunicked assassin. But in that moment he saw a second figure steal into the outer periphery of light thrown by the torch—a figure of a man whom Tharn recognized instantly as one of those who had accompanied Jotan on his search for Dylara a few days before.

As the arm holding the spear tensed to send it plunging into the unseen prisoner, the newcomer leaped cat-like upon the would-be assassin. There was a startled cry that echoed along the subterranean hall and the two men became a squirming knot of arms and legs.

And then abruptly the threshing figures were still as the second man pressed the blade of a flint knife against the other's thinly clad back.

"Not a move," growled Tamar, "or you are a dead man!"

NOW a lovely dark-haired girl came into view, her face revealed by the flickering light of the still burning torch lying on the corridor's flooring. As she bent to pick up the bit of blazing wood Tharn recognized her as Urim's daughter, whose life he had saved on a long gone day.

"What were you up to there?" growled Tamar. "Who are you and what—"

"Tamar!"

The cry came from behind the barred door from which the young nobleman had just drawn the cringing Sitab. There, framed in the barred opening, was Jotan!

Alurna, a faint cry of happiness on her lips, rushed to the door and removed the heavy bar. Jotan bounded into the narrow hallway, gave Sephar's princess a thankful pat on the back, then turned to Tamar.

"What's going on here? Who is this guard? How did you find me?"

"First," Tamar said, "I'm going to find out why this son of Gubo was about to send a spear into you!"

At Jotan's blank expression, Tamar explained what had been about to happen when he and Alurna arrived. Whereupon Jotan took the trembling Sitab by the front of his tunic and shook him until most of his breath was gone.

"Who sent you?" Jotan snarled. "Speak before I strangle you with my bare hands!"

"I dare not tell you! He would kill me!" Sitab cried through chattering teeth.

Again Jotan shook him. "But I will cut you into tiny pieces if you do not tell. First I will cut your toes and fingers from your rotten body, then I will dig out your eyes and chop off your—"

Sitiab had fainted.

Three ringing slaps brought the man back to consciousness. In a voice made shrill with terror he gave the name of the man who had sent him.

Tamar and Jotan stared at each other in utter amazement as the name of Vokal fell from those craven lips. Angrily Jotan hurled the shrinking figure from him, Sitab fell headlong against the stone wall and lapsed into a motionless heap of quivering flesh.

Tamar said, "That's all we need! We can go to Jaltor and tell him what this coward has said; then he will

free you and your father and put Vokal in your place."

"My father lives?" cried Jotan. "I thought Jaltor had slain him."

Quickly Tamar explained what had actually happened. When he had finished, Jotan said, "Before we do anything else I must find my father. Help me search these cells, both of you."

"He may not be on this level," Tamar said. "We could spend hours hunting him. The thing to do would be to go to Jaltor—"

But Jotan was already on his way along the corridor, peering in at the occupant of each.

MINUTES later there was a sizeable group of men freed from the cells and grouped about Jotan and Tamar. Among them was Garlud, Jotan's father, his gaunt face wreathed in smiles, his strength, sapped by long days of imprisonment, flowing back at the realization he was free and in possession of the name of the man who had brought about his downfall. The others were those members of Jotan's party who had accompanied him from far-off Sephar, released from their brief imprisonment and ready for action.

Tamar said, "And now we can go to Jaltor and tell him what happened!"

"We shall have to take this man—" Jotan pointed to the fallen and unmoving body of Sitab—"to Jaltor as our only witness against Vokal."

Garlud said, "It is hard to believe that Vokal is the one behind all this trouble. We have been friends for many years, all of Ammad loves him, even Jaltor admires him more than almost any noble of the court."

"He is behind the plot against us, father," Jotan said sharply. "There can be no doubt about it."

"We shall need overwhelming proof."

"Our proof lies there." Jotan waved

a hand at the motionless bulk near the wall. "Get him on his feet, somebody; it's time he told his story to Jaltor, king of Ammad!"

Tamar bent above the fallen man and shook him. "Come! You've rested long enough!"

But Sitab did not move and Tamar shook him again, harder this time, and repeated the order. Then suddenly the young noble was kneeling beside the still form of the guard and placing a hand against the tunic over his heart.

In the silence Tamar rose to his feet and met the stricken eyes of his friends. "He is dead," he said simply.

"There dies our proof," Garlud said glumly. "Now it is our word against Vokal's."

"No!" Jotan swung around to face his father and Tamar. "There is another way. We can go to Vokal's palace, pull him from his bed and force him to confess!"

"And what of Vokal's loyal guards and warriors?" Garlud said soberly. "Do you think they will idly stand aside and permit that?"

Jotan swept out his hand in a half circle. "Here are fifty men—stalwart warriors all. And in your own palace, father, are hundreds more. I say let us go to our own palace, gather together our warriors and march upon Vokal!"

"You forget," Garlud said softly, "that I am regarded as an enemy of the State. As such, my palace and possessions are confiscated and my warriors stripped of their weapons and confined to quarters."

"Jotan," said a quiet voice from behind them.

THE group of men standing about the subterranean corridor beneath the palace of Jaltor of Ammad, turned as the quiet voice reached their ears.

Standing at the barred opening of

one of the locked cells, the strong handsome face, visible in the light of the late Sitab's torch, was Tharn, a slight smile on his lips.

"Who calls my name?" demanded the young noble, stepping nearer the door of the cell.

"It is I—Tharn, son of Tharn, the cave man. Have you forgotten the times we have met in the past?"

Recognition dawned in Jotan's expression. "Of course! You are the man who claimed Dylara belonged to you."

"And she still belongs to me," Tharn said quietly.

"She lives?" Even the absence of more than dim light could not hide the sudden hope flaring in the young nobleman's eyes.

Tharn nodded. "Even now she is held prisoner by the man who has plotted against you."

Jotan stiffened. "You mean Vokal? How do you know this?"

Tharn, with a few terse words, explained what had taken place at Vokal's palace only a few short hours before. When he finished, Jotan was ready to start out for that nobleman's palace, alone if necessary, to rescue her. But others of the group remonstrated, pointing out the rashness of such a move. As they stood there arguing the point, Tharn's clear voice brought them into silence once more.

"There are too many of you to march against Vokal," he pointed out. "But all around you are men who are no better than dead as long as they remain behind bars. Free them, arm them with the weapons of the guards attached to this wing of Jaltor's palace, and they will march with you to overcome your enemy."

The idea caught instant hold. Moments later the group of fifty had swollen to three times that number as cell after cell of the lower three level of Jaltor's pits were emptied.

There were some of the prisoners who held back, preferring to remain

behind bars rather than become involved in a war between noblemen; while others had spent too long below ground to be little more than empty shells of men.

It was on the fourth level that they found several rooms furnished as quarters for the guards stationed in this wing of the palace. An ante-room contained a large supply of spears, bows and arrows and knives, but guards were on duty at that point, while a dozen others slept in the adjoining room.

After a brief council of war, it was decided that Tharn and Trakor would attempt to creep up on the two guards on duty just within the entrance to the arms-room and overpower them without permitting an alarm to be given. Should they succeed in doing this, it would be a simple matter to bar the only exit to the sleeping quarters, thus effectively keeping Jotan's men from being surprised from the rear by Jaltor's warriors.

While the embryo army waited on the level below, Tharn and young Trakor crept up the next ramp and moved stealthily toward their goal. Almost at once Trakor returned, a broad grin creasing his face, and beckoned the others to join him.

THEY found both guards bound and gagged, the door into the guard's quarters closed and barred, and weapons enough for an army at their disposal. With muffled cries of joy the men swept up bows, arrows, spears and knives; and what a few minutes before had been an unarmed mob was now a small compact army of disciplined men, ready to win amnesty and a nobleman's favor by helping to expose a traitor.

So great was the excitement, so strong the exultation of them all, that none noticed one of the recently freed prisoners detach himself from the group and steal back into the corri-

dor. An instant later this man was fleeing rapidly up the final ramp, on his way to freedom.

For more than an hour now the palace and grounds of Vokal, nobleman of Ammad, had been the scene of great activity. Every guard, every servant, scoured the four floors and palace grounds, inch by inch, in search for the girl who had fled Vokal's room.

While seemingly everywhere at once, the silver-haired nobleman spurred them on, his calmness gone, his eyes wild, fear riding him hard. He alone of them all knew what it would mean for him were this girl to escape and find her way to Jaltor with the knowledge she had gained while lurking on the balcony outside his private suite.

He was standing now in a room on the first floor, giving directions to Ekbar, captain of his guards, when one of the warriors pushed through the crowded room, a stranger at his heels.

"Your pardon, Most-High," said the guard, "but this man came to our gates a moment ago and demanded to see you. He says he has important information that is for your ears alone."

Vokal, turning to order the man aside, stopped and stared. The stranger was tall and little more than a skeleton. His hair hung in long strands to his shoulders and a heavy beard covered his face. Among a race of men who permitted no hair to mask their countenances, the beard alone made him worthy of attention.

"Who are you," Vokal snapped, "and what do you want of me?"

"I am Tarsal," croaked the stranger, "once guard in your service. Many moons ago I fought with one of Jaltor's guards and slew him. Since that day I have been confined in the pits of Ammad's king."

Ekbar, who had been staring at the

man closely while he was speaking, nodded. "He tells the truth, Most-High. I recognize him now."

"What do you want of me?" Vokal said again, his voice shrill with impatience.

"I came to warn you," Tarsal said. "Garlud and Jotan, his son, have escaped from their cells and have gathered together a small army taken from Jaltor's pits. They say that it was because of you that Garlud and Jotan were imprisoned by Jaltor, and they are coming to capture you and take you before the king."

The nobleman's skin turned a dirty white. This was ruin for him! Wildly he sought to think of some way by which he could escape Jaltor's wrath, once the truth came out.

"What are the plans of this mob?" he demanded. "Do they expect to win Jaltor's support in the fight against me?"

"Not that I know of, Most-High. They spoke of stealing from the palace and marching here to take you captive and bring you before Ammad's king that he may hear the truth from your own lips."

Vokal's brain was working with cold precision. There was a way out, then! Were he and his warriors able to ambush this gang of prison rats, able to wipe them out to the last man, there would be none left alive to tell Jaltor what they had hoped to accomplish.

All thoughts of the mysterious young woman who had raced from his apartment earlier that night were forgotten as he whirled about to confront the open-mouthed Ekbar.

"There is still time," he cried, "to save ourselves. Listen to me closely, Ekbar, and do exactly as I say!"

AS THE heavily armed force of perhaps one hundred and fifty men entered one of Ammad's broad avenues no more than two blocks from

Vokal's palace, Jotan called it to a halt while the leaders conferred.

Five men comprised the leadership of the relatively small army. They were Jotan and his father, Tamar, Tharn and young Trakor. Almost from the first it was Tharn to whom the others turned for guidance, despite the fact that he was a complete stranger to Ammad.

"How many men," Tharn asked, "are likely to be defending Vokal's palace?"

"No less than five hundred," Jotan said grimly. "We shall be badly outnumbered my friend."

"We have something on our side worth hundreds of warriors," Tharn observed. "Surprise is our biggest and best ally. If we can win our way into Vokal's palace and reach the quarters of Vokal himself before his guards are sufficiently alerted to interfere, the fight will be over before it begins."

"And how do you propose this shall be done?"

Tharn rubbed his chin while his quick mind reviewed the situation. "I think," he said finally, "That it would be better if Trakor and I went ahead and removed the guards outside the wall gates. Then our entire force can enter the grounds themselves and hide in the shrubbery there until a door at the rear of the palace can be unbarred. It might serve us best if Trakor and I go directly to Vokal's room and take him captive before we give the signal for the rest of you to enter."

Garlud was shaking his head. "No. That is risking too much. If the two of you were captured, the entire palace would be alerted before the rest of us could put a foot inside it. Then indeed would we be helpless; Vokal's men could cut us down from the safety of the palace walls."

The five stood there in the silent sleeping street, stone walls rising

steep and bleak on either side, the entire army behind them hidden from chance view by the almost total lack of light. There was less than two hours remaining before dawn and they must act quickly or lose their chief aid: the darkness of the now moonless night.

It was finally decided that Tharn and Trakor, as a tribute to their superior experience in tracking down the most wary of prey, were the ones to remove the guards outside at least two of the gates in Vokal's wall of stone.

And so it was that the two Cromagnards stole away into the darkness, armed with arrows and bow and two good flint knives.

Half an hour later both were back, reporting success to the other leaders. "It was almost too easy," Tharn said thoughtfully. "Where there were four guards at one of the gates earlier tonight, I found but one—and he was sitting with his back to the gate and fast asleep. After I slew him I went on to help Trakor, only to learn he had had an almost similar experience."

"It is not uncommon for guards to sleep at their posts," Jotan said impatiently. "Let us get started before other of Vokal's guards discover the gates are unguarded and rouse the palace defenders."

"I think we should make sure we are not going blindly into some trap," Tharn demurred. "This entire thing is suspicious . . . too easy."

But Jotan waved the cave lord into silence. "Can't you understand," he said crisply, "that we don't have time for that? I say let's get on with our plan and not spend time worrying about things that will never happen."

In this both Gärud and Tamar agreed, and so Tharn shrugged and said no more. He was in league with these Ammadians for only one reason: to make it that much easier for him to snatch Dylara from this strange city and return with her to

the caves of his own people. What had happened to her, once he and Trakor had fled Vokal's palace earlier that night, leaving her hidden within the building, was something he could not know. But there was no other place in all of Ammad he knew where to look for her, and so he must act in the belief that she still was behind the palace walls, either hidden there or once more a captive of the rascally nobleman.

LESS than half an hour later all of Jotan's band of warriors squatted behind the belt of foliage just within the walls of Vokal's sprawling palace. In the dim light of stars they could look out between the interstices of growing things, seeing the many windowed bulk of stone rising four full floors above the neighboring terrain. No where in all that vast expanse was there a sign of life. No candle showed its brief flame at any window. Silent and dark and somehow a place of brooding danger.

After another whispered conference, Tharn left the other leaders of the band and flitted across the open ground, moving like a black shadow toward the same doorway through which Trakor had raced to join him only an hour or two earlier.

Those watching him from the shadowy foliage lost sight of him almost at once; and when, a few moments later, he seemed to rise from the ground almost under their noses, a startled gasp from a dozen throats made a rustling sound against the heavy silence.

"The door is still unbarred," Tharn reported, frowning. "I am even surer now, noble Jotan, that we are heading straight for a trap set up by the wily Vokal."

"He could not know our plans," Jotan said impatiently. "It means simply that they forgot to bar the door after the excitement you and your friend caused them earlier. Things are work-

ing out well for us."

Tharn smiled his enigmatic smile and said no more. Quickly the five leaders moved among their eager troops, issuing orders down the line. And then, at a single word from Jotan the band of one hundred and fifty armed men stepped into the open and started for the palace walls.

Suddenly the shrill cry of a woman rose against the weighted silence. "Back!" the voice screamed from high above them. "Go back! It is a trap!"

"Dylara!" Tharn shouted, and with great bounding strides he raced toward the palace. Startled by the shrill shout, puzzled by Tharn's dash into the jaws of what might be a trap, the hundred and fifty wavered uncertainly, then charged after the racing cave man.

And as the first wave of Jotan's warriors reached the halfway mark in the clearing, a hundred flaming branches were hurled from the open windows into the courtyard beneath, their flames lighting up the entire ribbon of open ground and disclosing the pitifully small army to the waiting warriors of Vokal.

A rain of arrows, spears and clubs now rained down from those windows upon the men beneath. Men reeled and fell, some instantly dead, others badly wounded. Some of those unhit stopped in their tracks, looked wildly around, then turned to flee for the safety of the street behind them.

And it was then that Vokal's masterful plan was fully unveiled. From those same openings through the stone wall encircling Vokal's estate, came other of that nobleman's warriors, stationed in places of concealment outside, their purpose to close off the last avenue of escape for Jotan's troops.

IN all this confusion, with death threatening from all sides, Trakor had eyes only for his friend and companion—Tharn, lord of the caves.

At first he did not comprehend what lay behind the cave man's mad dash toward the palace. But when he saw Tharn leap lightly up to catch the sill of one window, then swarm rapidly up toward the second story, he understood fully what lay in the giant warrior's mind.

One of Vokal's warriors leaned from a window directly in Tharn's path and raised his spear with the obvious intention of burying its head in the cave man's defenseless body as it hung a full fifteen feet above the ground. Trakor, seeing this, fitted an arrow to his bow with unthinkable quickness and sent the flint tipped missile across space and full into the enemy warrior's exposed chest.

The heavy spear rolled from an already dead hand and the man fell loosely across the wide sill as Tharn worked his way upward past the limp body.

Three more attempts were made by those within to bring down the climbing cave man. On each occasion Trakor, standing like a rock amid a shower of deadly weapons that struck every where about him, brought down the would-be killer.

Tharn was only a few feet from the roof's edge now, his naked feet and long-fingered hands finding foot—and hand-holds where Trakor would have sworn none existed.

Trakor, watching, groaned with sudden fear. Barely visible in the flickering light of torches below, a figure appeared at the roof's edge directly above Tharn's rising form. In the figure's hands was a heavy spear and the arm holding it swept aloft preparatory to skewering Tharn on its point.

Even as Trakor witnessed this, an arrow from his bow was flashing up toward that menacing warrior. But the combination of bad light, distance and the necessity for haste was too great a handicap for success, and the arrow whizzed wide of its mark.

Again Trakor groaned. There was no time for a second shot. Tharn was doomed to die.

And in that second a slender figure appeared at the roof's edge beside the would-be assassin and threw itself headlong against him. The man staggered back under the impact, his spear falling from his hand, then turned and closed with the newcomer.

As the two of them teetered there on the thin strip of stone forming the roof's edge, Tharn's strong hands closed about that same edge and he rose to his feet. He saw who it was that had saved his life: Dylara, daughter of Majok.

Even as he raced forward to save the girl he loved from being thrown into the void below, Tharn knew he was too late. Voicing a scream of fear, Dylara reeled back and toppled into space!

As her feet left the roof, Tharn threw himself headlong in a direction parallel with the edge, one arm out-thrust, the other bent to check his fall. For one agonizing second the reaching hand encountered only air; then his fingers brushed against cloth, closed like a snapped trap, and as his muscular frame crashed against the roof's edge, a sudden jerk against his outstretched arm told him he had checked Dylara's fall.

A heavy sandal thudded home against his ribs, nearly rolling him into the void and to death on the packed earth below. Before the swinging foot could strike home a second time, Tharn was on his feet and Dylara was swung back to safety of the roof.

As Tharn released the girl, the screaming, clawing figure of his enemy closed upon him. In the faint light, Tharn saw the other's hair was a silvery white and beneath it was a face once gentle but now transformed into the mask of a madman.

A GRIM smile touched Tharn's lips as one of his brawny arms snaked out and caught the raving beast that had once been Vokal, third most powerful and influential figure in all Ammad. With almost casual ease Tharn swung the human form high above his head, then tossed him, a screaming missile of terror, to the ground below.

A long eerie wailing cry ended suddenly and the thud of flesh against earth seemed to jar into silence the tumult filling the grounds of the late Vokal's palace. In the light of the still burning torches Vokal's lifeless body was clearly visible to the palace defenders.

In that hushed moment, Jotan took advantage of the miracle that had saved the remnants of his fighting force.

"Vokal is dead!" he shouted. "Vokal the traitor is no more! Lay down your arms, warriors of the dead Vokal! Lay down your arms that you may win forgiveness from Jaltor, king of Ammad!"

A wavering moment of indecision followed as the warriors at the palace windows stood with raised weapons hesitating to decide one way or the other. And in that moment a brawny figure appeared at one of the open windows.

"Death to the invader!" shouted Ekbar, captain of the late Vokal's guards. "Avenge the noble Vokal! Kill them all!"

As the last words left his lips a second man appeared beside the captain. Before the latter could realize what was taking place a stone knife flashed in a savage arc, burying its length in his heart.

Ekbar voiced a single scream of anguish and toppled across the sill and to the ground beneath, dead beside the master he had so faithfully served.

While from that same window a

young warrior of that same dead master smiled with grim satisfaction. Otar had made sure his bride, the lovely Marua, would never again be visited by her former suitor.

With Ekbar died the last of all resistance against Jotan's invading warriors. Scores of weapons fell uselessly to the ground and the palace defenders began to stream from the building, their hands lifted in surrender.

And it was then that a quiet voice from behind Jotan and his father said:

"Are the pits of Jaltor so shallow that they may not hold my enemies?"

The nobleman and his son wheeled about, then stiffened to rigid attention at sight of Jaltor, king of Ammad, standing at the forefront of a squad of his own guards.

CHAPTER XV

CONCLUSION

DAWN had come an hour before but the group of seven people sat about the breakfast table in the private dining room of Jaltor, ruler of Ammad.

It was a wide, richly furnished room on the top floor of the city's palace. The east wall was composed entirely of windows, barred by fluted, slender columns of white stone, through which streamed the bright rays of morning sun.

"Had you delayed your escape from the pits another two hours," Jaltor was saying, "all of you would have been freed without having to fight for proof of your innocence. For old Heglar's mate, the beautiful Rhoea, had been followed to Vokal's palace, and when she left there, my men picked her up and brought her to me at the palace. Strangely enough she was not at all hesitant about betraying Vokal; I think she believed he was trying to get out of taking her as his mate."

"Then instead of helping," Alurna

said, smiling, "I nearly brought about Jotan's death. That should be a lesson to me not to mix in another's affairs!"

Jotan smiled at her briefly, then went back to his apparently careful examination of the earthen plate in front of him. Ever since he had seated himself across the table from Dylara and the broad-shouldered young cave man next to her he had little to say. But in his mind there was a welter of conflicting thoughts and emotions.

Fate had thrown the girl he loved into the arms of the man who long ago had claimed her as his mate. The fortunes of war had made that same man Jotan's ally during the night just past. Could Jotan, then, turn against his ally because he too loved the girl whom Jotan desired above all others?

He stole a glance at the radiant young woman who held his heart in the hollow of one slender hand. How lovely she was! And how closely she leaned toward the young giant of the caves who sat beside her. Her smiles were for the man of her own kind; as the minutes passed they seemed more and more to belong to each other.

Well, it was up to Dylara now. Soon she would be called upon to make a decision: to accompany the cave man back across the vast expanse of plain and forest and mountain range to the caves of his people . . . or to remain within Ammad as the mate of Jotan, nobleman of Ammad.

Beside Jotan, no less lovely in a completely different physical appearance, was Alurna of Sephar, daughter of one king and niece of another. Often her eyes strayed to the handsome young nobleman next to her. She saw his eyes go to the girl of the caves and back to his plate again as a wave of color poured up into his cheeks. She knew what was going on in his mind—knew it as if he had spoken the words aloud! The next few hours would decide what her future life would be: Jotan's mate or

a woman who had lost her bid for happiness.

In all that room, perhaps, only two men did not feel the cross currents of emotions that seemed to make electric the very air about them. One missed it entirely because he was very young and interested in only one person—that was Trakor. The other was Tharn; and while he understood what lay behind Jotan's studied preoccupation, he was indifferent to it. Dylara belonged to him—and though an entire nation might stand between them, he would claim her for his own.

As for Dylara, she smiled warmly at everyone and said little. For she too was waiting—waiting with the serenity of one whose mind is made up as to the course her life would take.

"All of you are weary," Jaltor said finally. "I suggest slaves show you to the quarters I have set aside for those of you who wish to remain as my guests."

His eyes went to the three cave people questioningly. There was a moment of weighed silence . . . and into it Tharn said:

"Dylara, Trakor and I are far from the caves of our people. I, for one, am anxious to start back. Perhaps we will sleep until tomorrow's sun—then begin our journey."

As he finished speaking, his eyes came to rest upon the cave girl.

A BREATHLESS hush seemed to settle over the room. The moment had come—and Tharn had so phrased his words that the daughter of Majok now held the key to the hopes of two men . . . and the choice was hers, without pressure from either of those two.

Jotan's head came up and his eyes met the brown, sunflecked gaze of the cave girl. A deep, chest-swelling breath filled his lungs . . .

"I am not tired," Dylara said calmly. "I would like to start for your caves at once, Tharn."

And with those words, and the lifting of her hand as she placed it on the cave lord's bronzed forearm, Dylara made her choice.

Pain—the awful pain of unrequited love—rose like flames in Jotan's heart. Rose until they shook him with agony . . . swelled . . . and broke to settle back under the man's iron control.

He was conscious, then, that a soft hand and placed itself on one of his as it lay palm down against the table. He looked down at it, not understanding, then lifted his eyes slowly to meet the troubled eyes of Alurna . . .

Jotan said, "I had hoped that you three would remain in Ammad for a few suns as the guests of my father and me. But I can understand your eagerness to return to your own people."

Dyta, the sun, stood two hours above the eastern horizon. On a small hillock a few yards from the edge of dense jungle and forest not far from Ammad's walls, stood a group of Jaltor's warriors flanking the king and his guests.

Silence, broken only by the voices of diurnal jungle, held those on the high bit of ground as they watched the three Cro-Magnons move lightly toward that towering wall of verdure. They moved lightly, eagerly, as though anxious to lose themselves among the riotous vegetation, a familiar world to them.

Jotan, watching, felt a strange peace come into his heart. Only now did realization come that at no time during the past moons since Dylara had come into his life did he have the slightest chance to win her love. He stole a quick glance at the girl beside him. Here was the perfect mate for a nobleman—his own kind, fit to take up the duties of mate to one of his own high station. Yes, he told himself, it was better this way.

His eyes went back to the three now

almost within the jungle's reach. The girl turned back and waved her hand in farewell, joined by the lifted arms of Trakor and Tharn.

Abruptly a mist seemed to form

before Jotan's eyes and he bowed his head, blinking rapidly to dispel this evidence of unmanly weakness.

When he looked up again only the empty distance met his eyes.

WATCH THE BIRDIE



By A. Morris



PHOTOGRAPHY in science is nothing new. And it is common knowledge that is has proven one of the strongest weapons in the whole arsenal of scientific research. Where visual observation of any phenomenon is purely transitory, photography provides a permanent record perfect for examination long after the particular event has occurred.

It has enabled tremendous advances in astronomy. The combination of spectroscope and photographic plate is unbeatable and has taught us more about the stars and our universe than anything before.

But it is in applied physics and theoretical physics rather than in any other science like astronomy or biology that photography has shown its worth. In particular, nuclear physics would have gotten exactly nowhere without the plate.

By means of devices like the cloud chamber devised by the English physicist, Wilson, an atom photographs itself! And it's all done without the aid of lenses or shutters. A photographic plate is inserted in the cloud chamber which is merely a water or alcohol vapor filled chamber whose volume can be altered by means of a plunger or a bulb. The atomic reaction is allowed to occur within the chamber, and the result appears as a series of foggy trails from which sufficient light is reflected to permit the photographic plate to capture the effect.

Super high speed cameras are another astounding invention for the observation of physical events. These cameras are considerably different from the usual run of motion picture cameras. They may take thousands of exposures per minute. Primarily they consist of a film fixed to a rotating wheel which spins at a high speed. Through a suitable lens system and shutter arrangement, the exposures are made and high speed events which ordinarily could not be seen are readily observed when the film is shown at a slow rate or examined individually.

In x-ray work, film plays an important part. To begin with the eye cannot directly observe x-radiation. Therefore one

of two things must be done. Either the x-radiation must impinge on a fluorescent screen which is then photographed or the x-radiation may be allowed to fall directly on the plate, producing the desired image.

Film is also used as a detector of any kind of dangerous radiation that is so commonly found today in laboratories where any work on nuclear physics is done. Men working in such laboratories wear on their bodies strips of film which are fogged by the slightest trace of radiation. By examination of this film it is then possible to tell whether or not a man has been exposed to dangerous rays. Steps can then be taken to provide suitable treatment or such radiation can be stopped from then on.

Even in the recording of scientific documents, film plays an important role. Whole libraries can be photographed on minute strips of film, and the results filed for future reference. Thus vast amounts of precious material can be stored without taking the valuable space so necessary for other things than records.

The new development that is anxiously awaited, that is, in fact, being hurriedly worked upon, is the identification of negative and positive. That is, film is desired which requires little or no developing treatment and which may be used directly without first converting to a positive.

This is a difficult task, but cameras are available even today where in the photography and the developing occur at practically the same time. This will be a tremendous boon to everyone concerned with photographic reproduction. Photography is a relatively young science, but is wise and old in the ways of technology. Give it more time and it will become still more simplified. Especially important is the combination of photography with direct positive reproduction. This will change the whole world of the science. Nothing equals it other than the applications of direct color photography which has taken such tremendous strides in recent years. Now by means of merely a single lens, color photographs are made!

"Nine and Twenty Moons"



By KAY BENNETT



.. Our Solar System's strange and fascinating satellites ..

THE Solar System has more to it than planets. An intra-galactic visitor to our system would find his greatest surprise in the strangely large number of satellites that our system possesses. Up until a couple of months ago the system held *twenty-eight* moons—now, with the discovery of another and fifth satellite of the planet Uranus, the number has jumped.

If nothing else, the discoverers of the satellites have given them nice romantic names. Saturn's satellites are named (in order of distance from the mother planet), *Nimas, Enceladus, Tethys, Dione, Rhea, Titan, Hyperion, Iapetus, and Phoebe*; Uranus' are named, *Ariel, Umbriel, Titania, Oberon*, and the new one as yet unnamed: *Neptune's, Triton*; Earth's, *Moon*; Mars', *Phobos and Deimos*; Jupiter's, *Io, Europa, Ganymede, Callisto* and the rest unnamed. This is an imposing list of lesser planets which in effect are what moons are.

It is generally believed that the majority of the moons are much like our own, insofar as they do not possess any atmosphere that we can detect. Titan is an exception as are some of the moons of Jupiter. Of course this is highly speculative and may someday be knocked into a cocked hat by the ones who make the trip to them—and that will come.

There are many curiosities about the moons that are interesting to consider. The satellites of Uranus, for example, unlike those of any other planet, rotate about the mother-planet at *right angles* to the plane of the ecliptic. This is highly irregular, and there seems to be no logical reason for them to do so, at least if certain aspects of cosmological theory are considered. A list of the discoverers of all the moons in the system would be of purely historical interest.

Over three hundred and thirty-eight years, outside of our own Moon, none of these celestial objects were known. Then pioneer Galileo turned his feeble telescope to the skies, to the planet Jupiter and clearly spotted the four major satellites! The pinpoints of light that he saw moved during nightly observations, confirming his belief that they were satellites.

If you have never gazed through a telescope during a warm summer evening at the planet Jupiter, and have never seen those dots of light, you have not lived.

Most of us have looked at the Moon at one time or another; we have seen the craters and the plains, the dead-sea beds and the moun-

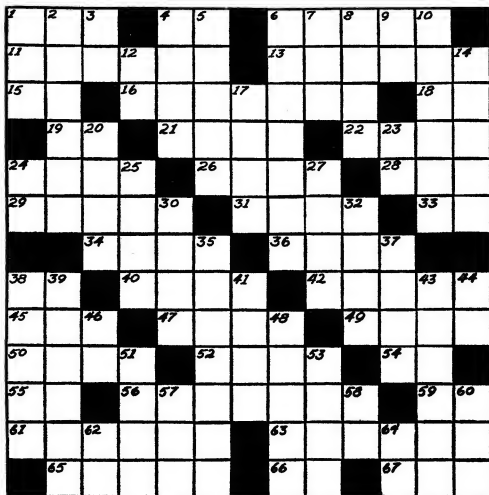
tains, and have been duly impressed. But to look at the moons of Jupiter through even a low-powered telescope brings a thrill that almost defies description. Actually there is not a great deal to be seen; it's not like looking at the Moon where everything is so clearly outlined and so near. But looking at the four major satellites of Jupiter is a more terrific thrill in that you are particularly aided by your mind's eye—your imagination.

First you see very clearly the round bulk of massive Jupiter, and perhaps, if the scope is steady enough you see the bands and striations that encircle it—maybe even the "spot." As you watch more attentively and your eye becomes more acutely tuned to the seeing, you see the little specks of light to the sides of the planet. They may be near or far away from it, depending on the time of the year. You may not see all four, but whatever is visible, is magnificent! A little voice in the back of your mind, whispers, "you are peering into the depths of space, you are seeing sights undreamt of. Can you imagine yourself out *there*, actually visiting those satellites whose feeble beams of reflected sunlight come to you now?"

As impressive, is a glimpse, not through photographs, but through an actual telescope held in your hand, of the rings of Saturn. This too is incredible. A man's imagination is staggered by the sight. It makes one realize one's insignificance and yet it affirms our belief in the fact that after all is said and done, *we are* the observers. Your mind goes hog-wild with speculation at the sights. There is nothing like practical astronomy to serve as inspiration.

Our Earth and its Moon have maintained a singular distinction. In fact, it is not correct to regard the Moon as a satellite. Because it is so huge and such a big part, comparatively speaking, of our planet, we may think of it as another planet unto itself. Astronomers, mathematically speaking, always think and speak of the Moon-Earth system as a "double-planet" system. Dynamically the two behave that way and hence offer sufficient justification for it.

The end is not yet. Who knows what other moons may be discovered. Because many of them are so small, it may take time, but it is likely that as more and more astronomical plates are examined, more and more dots will be located and we can say—the solar system has another moon!



AMAZING STORIES

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

By BRUCE D. KELLY

HORIZONTAL

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Given name of popular AMAZING writer | 16. Next to oxygen, chief elementary constituent of earth's crust |
| 4. Preposition | 18. Preposition |
| 6. Shaverian cavern dwellers | 19. Preposition |
| 11. With whom Kidwell holds AMAZING literary debates | 21. Localities |
| 13. Excretes | 22. Love to excess |
| 15. Polynesian shrub | 24. Nude |

26. Characteristic fleshy carpellate fruit of malaceous trees
28. Exclamation of disgust
29. Positive electrode
31. Maxims
33. Compare (abbr.)
34. Linear measure
36. Device for changing direction of light rays
38. In the work cited (abbr.)
40. Soft mineral used in powder
42. Ceremonial acts
45. Pertinent
47. Tasteful
49. Skin
50. Portico
52. Air
54. 3.1416
55. Preposition
56. English philosopher
59. Symbol for cobalt
61. Apelike
63. Into this
65. Non-animal organism
66. Linear measure (abbr.)
67. Shoshonean Indian

VERTICAL

1. Time system (abbr.)
2. Buckeye
3. Symbol for sodium
4. Count
5. Lower deck
6. Numbered by tens
7. Psychology: the self
8. Split
9. Symbol for osmium
10. Figuratively, resting
12. Against (abbr.)
14. Lofty
17. Combining form meaning twenty
20. Preposition
23. Preposition
24. Symbol for barium
25. Direct editorial policies
27. Widemouthed jar
30. Dash
32. Unique Writing
35. Principle
37. Gait
38. Combining form meaning sight
39. Strong-scented herb of mint family
41. Brother of Abel
43. Educate
44. Street (abbr.)
46. Preposition
48. Peevish
51. Continent
53. Require
57. Cooking utensil
58. Railroad (abbr.)
60. Unit
62. Milliliter (abbr.)
64. Prefix meaning good

ANSWERS ON PAGE 154

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PUSH-BUTTON WORLD

★ By PETE BOGG ★

THE world is becoming incredibly complex. There are machines to make machines and eventually these machines will be made by still other machines—all of this almost without human attention. The Czech dramatist who wrote the fictional piece of a world taken over by robots may eventually be proven to have been a visionary. Regardless, the world is bent on such a revolution as nothing can stop and the tool of the revolution is not the loud-mouthed political agitator, but simply the man who works over the drawing board and whose hands are always wrapped around tools.

The new invention that inspires such a pessimistic opening is a gadget that would have one of the greatest men in the world rolling over in his grave. If anyone were to ask what the single most important invention had been, the logical answer would probably be "printing." Through printing all the knowledge of the world is disseminated. Johannes Gutenberg would be surprised if he could see the modern rotary presses that do most of the world's printing work. They are beautiful gigantic complex machines, but they are not so different from his early press that he would be unable to recognize the fact that they take ink from a source, deposit it on typefaces and press paper to it, resulting in the printed word.

But now word comes of a new machine. This machine will undoubtedly replace the printing press as we know it. Already it is in use on a number of types of printing—among them, bookwork and newspaper work.

To outward intents and purposes, the machine looks similar to a rotary press, and indeed it is fed with rolls of paper just as is the other, but there the similarity ends.

The machine contains a roller around which is wrapped the plate or mat from which the printing is done. Unlike a conventional roller this may be made from any light material because no pressure will be exerted on it! This roller containing the print to be used, is given an electric charge by means of a suitable electronic static generator.

Then it revolves over—without touching—another roller carrying the type of ink to be used. The separation between the rolls may be as great as half an inch. The ink-carrying roll contains a static charge of the opposite sign. Automatically the ink jumps from the inking roller to the printing roller!

The paper passes underneath the roller but not touching it. The paper carries also an opposite charge to the roller. It too may be as much as a half inch from the roller. Then the ink jumps

the gap from the roller to the paper and produces a perfect impression on the paper! The printing job has been done with the roller or type not even touching the paper.

This is an incredible accomplishment—and so simple. It means that printing can be done on both sides of the paper at once, the paper can travel at as high a speed as it can without tearing. There is no tension to worry about except in the paper itself. The density of the printing can be controlled by turning a potentiometer knob which varies the voltage between the paper and the roller, thus altering the lightness or blackness of the type.

This machine is not in the future. It is here. And it costs about one-third the price of a regular rotary press.

OTHER developments, in printing particularly, are as astounding. There is a movement afoot to eliminate the time-consuming, expensive linotype-machine, matt-plate-process. In the new system machines have been invented which automatically justify—"control the width of the printed line"—they are nothing but complex typewriters. They may be operated by relatively unskilled hands. The typewritten sheet—which looks like printed copy—is then produced photographically and automatically engraved on magnesium plates which are fed to the presses.

The use of magnesium instead of zinc and copper is going on at a great rate. Anything that will change the age-old techniques of printing is being seized avidly, for ever since the invention of the printing press there had not been an extraordinary change in the industry. This is changing.

In a recent edition of Harper's magazine, a writer discussing these technological innovations went so far as to remark "that eventually they'll feed authors in one end of a machine and books wrapped in dust jackets will come out the other end!"

While we have especially discussed the printing industry we could pick almost any industrial work at random and discover similar changes. There is no limit to human inventiveness and each new thing brings with it manifold knowledge which in turn causes an acceleration of inventiveness.

The present limitations on scientific knowledge do not lie in industrial capacity. They lie rather in basic research. Scientists are already complaining that our heritage of fundamental scientific research is rapidly running out. With the invention of the atomic bomb, we used up the last of the research in basic science that has so frequently emanated from the laboratories of Europe. It is now up to the United States to supply the world with the disinterested and objective scientific work that comes from men who are not interested in making gadgets.

There is a strong tendency in this country to confuse "gadget progress" with scientific research. They are two distinct things. Applied science is

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MACHINE MIGHT

★ By J. R. MARKS ★

IT IS SAID that the strength of a nation lies in its people. This is one of those half-truths that on the surface appears completely plausible. But there is an even more important requirement for a nation to be considered great—and that requirement lies in its national resources. What made the great nations of the world great? Examine them—the United States, England, France, Germany, Russia—and you will find that within their borders they have something even more important than the people that represent them. They have huge deposits of national wealth. Sheffield, Birmingham, Essen, the Ruhr, the Saar, Pittsburgh, Detroit, the Donetz Basin—those are the places where the nations were made.

Steel and coal, oil, water power—all the requirements of an industrial civilization lie among the great nations.

However, it does not automatically follow that a nation having these resources becomes great by our unusual standards. Consider China, for example. This country has vast quantities of mineral deposits, yet industrially the country is only beginning to awaken. Why is this? Possibly it is because there is an excess of humans making life and labor so cheap that there was no incentive for the extraction of national wealth.

A whole new science is springing up from a study of the types of facts narrated above. Ecology, the study of resources on a world wide scale, is being utilized to try and bring peace into the world. Because natural resources are not distributed fairly, scientists are trying to weigh one valuable property against another. "No man is an island unto himself..." says the poet. This is even more true about nations. What one has another needs. By scientific distribution, ecologists believe that the ills of the world may be at last beaten, and that wars may somehow be prevented. Ingenious peoples can make something of their lands no matter how poor those lands may

be. A balance can be struck between the gain and expenditure of national wealth. Until recently the United States, alone among the great nations of the world, profligately squandered its natural resources without a thought for the morrow. But no longer. Our ecologists are spending millions of man-hours studying the methods of the planners.

The shortages of oil, of hydro-electric power on the West coast, the great scattering of topsoil during the depression—all these things have set men thinking, and often when men do really think, good comes of it.

At present, systematic and scientific investigation of every resource is going on not only here but all over the world—even behind the Iron Curtain. It is realized that the world population is growing, and that if present living standards are to be maintained, resources must be expended logically, not indiscriminately and carelessly.

So once more science is setting the guiding light toward what can be a peaceful and happy world. None of this of course considers what might happen should the political fanatics of the world throw things out of gear once more, as the madman Adolph Hitler did such a short time ago.

* * *

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★ By L. A. BURT ★

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from the gateway to the white marble wonder at the far end of the grounds. Between the gate and the Taj is a raised marble tank also supplied by fountains, in which the Taj is reflected. Before all mosques in India there are marble or stone tanks of water in which the devout Musselman removes his sandals and performs his ablutions. The Taj is built on a huge platform three hundred feet square. On each corner of the platform is built an exquisite cylindrical minaret 133 feet high.

The Taj is inlaid with black marble texts from the Koran on each side of the entrance and at the many alabaster screens through which the bright sunlight filters into the softly lighted interior. The bands of carved relief and the panels of inlay work afford endless study. There are forty kinds of cornelian inlaid in one small flower. There is no place that is not wrought with the most intricate art that has its own particular beauty. Underneath the lofty dome, within a space enclosed by a marble trellis, which resembles fine lace work of many exquisite designs, are two marble caskets resting on inlaid platforms. One is a bit larger than the other, but both are inlaid with precious stones and elaborately decorated. The real resting place of the Emperor and his favorite wife is in the vault directly beneath these ornamental sarcophagi. There is a mosque on each side of the Taj. One is used for prayer and the other is a resting place or place of contemplation. Visitors come from all over the world to visit this jewel of architecture, the most romantic edifice ever built to demonstrate a man's devotion to the memory of his dead wife.

It was built at a cost of over nine million dollars and the revenues of the empire were depleted to such an extent that the son of the emperor finally put him off the throne and imprisoned him in the great fortress. He spent the last seven years of his life in the Jasmine tower where he could see in the distance the final resting place of his favorite wife.

No other single building has ever been more described. It has been sketched, painted and photographed. It is studied in architectural textbooks. It has been modeled in gold, silver, alabaster, and almost every material that can yield to sculptor's art, and still no duplicate can be made to express a satisfactory idea of the exquisite loveliness, the purity of the material of which it is made, and the richness of its decorations. Any small part of it would be enough to immortalize the architect. No other mortal, no matter how great, has ever had a tomb to compare with this. The favorite wife of Shah Jehan, "The Exalted One Of The Palace," has but a small place in history, but her devoted husband raised her name from oblivion, and has immortalized her by making her dust the tenant of the world's most beautiful and majestic monument.

* * *

SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 95)

of the scientist's reward as tiny fragments of the vast picture-puzzle drop into place.

We have not been able to come to any hard and fast conclusions because the subject presents none. It is still, as it were, in the stage of flux, although some day, I not only hope, but also believe, that the Americas will have a history. Such a history is needed, not only for the just replacement of a great people's pride, but as a corrective for just the kind of thinking which brought about such books as those of Gibbon and of Spengler.

Yet from this adventure in research we do seem to have learned something. The weapon, face-painting, dress, burial, etc. that should logically go with the Great Bird is to be found largely in the north. The spears which the Norse Eddas define for us as "serpents"² and which we realize should logically be the weapon of the Snake, and in fact, the whole of the Karib-complex seems to radiate out from the eastern shore nearest the Caribbean, and the Nahuas with their incorporation of so many traits of the South Seas, are at least partially explained.

THE entire picture is, of course, not this simple, but if the challenge of its partial solving has been immense, the great vistas of hoary antiquity which we have been among the first to glimpse are the payments which are the most dearly treasured by the inquiring mind, even though the final result is always the same—we only learn how little we know, or for that matter, anyone knows of the age of man, and his unending struggle upward along the path of civilization.

The mystery of it all, in the Americas, is, of course, that at the dawn of the long line of succeeding civilizations stands the Megalith. This is the one which built the best roads, and terraced the hillsides, built its walls with such consummate skill, and reckoned by the calendar which in all respects is better than ours of today. Furthermore, we suspect that this is the one which left a trace of quipu-reckoning in China in the third millennium B.C., dug mines with bronze picks better than our steel, and possibly used iron.³ Perhaps this is the

² The Norse phrase, "venomous serpents passed through their bodies," has been unhesitatingly translated by the sages of at least a dozen tribes, for me, as meaning that the spears in the battle had been poisoned.

³ Iron mines around Lake Titicaca were anciently worked, while several South American tongues seem to have pre-Spanish names for the metal. It may have even been cast, since in the Mounds one bronze article that greatly resembled a scabbard had a quantity of iron dust in it. Possibly the art of smelting it was lost so long ago, while there is something about the metal which



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civilization which grew the great ears of legendary corn, and the cotton in so many colors that it did not need to be dyed.⁴ This was probably the civilization which engineered the finest dams, built the best bridges and left the rich heritage of foods, only part of which have come down to us today.

What was the reason for its complete death? Was it a too steady stream of invasion? Was this the cause, too, for the obvious degeneration of succeeding cultures? Was it ritualistic war and its accompanying evil of human sacrifice? Or was it the dessicating homeland of the Great Karib Civilization, which could not survive a series of unending disasters? And which in their collapse, carried down the whole substructure? Or, was it a combination of all of these? Each of us must answer this question for ourselves, as the study has revealed for us the puzzling pageant, and the question which follows that revelation.

There is perhaps no more fitting ending to the story of the Americas than the words of its oldest book, The Chilam Balam. In its allegory, we seem to read the old clash of the calendars and in the mention of Ah-Musem-Cab, which its translator, A. M. Bolio, linguist, scholar and scientist, as well as full-blooded Mayan, assures us means literally "secret-red-of-earth," or in other words, lava, we are able to read the tale of a violent volcanic disaster. In fact, Sr. Bolio is of the opinion that this monitic document is an actual eye-witness account of the sinking of the motherland—perhaps the same as Plato's grandfather Solon was told about when he visited the Temple of Vulcan in Egypt, and whose account, surviving the early histories, has come down to us as the story of legendary Atlantis. Such a possibility would make this book the oldest upon earth.

SR. Bolio is of the further opinion that "when the earth began to awaken" should be considered as "when an old epoch was ending and a new one was about to begin." The Thirteen Gods, he says, are even at present thought of as particularly favoring his people The Mayans, but as having at one time been all-powerful. (The obvious calendrical significance here is most striking.)

It is unnecessary to go into the analogy of words which so many Atlantis enthusiasts from Brasseur

does not allow it to last as long as other metals when given the same amount of exposure. When last in Death Valley, I chanced upon an old iron cooking pot of some lost caravan, probably that of Manley's party, and my soft digging stick with which I was attempting to remove it from its bed in the sand, went right through it. Furthermore, it kept on flaking off continually.

⁴ It was not imagination that the early manuscripts drew upon when they mention cotton grown in colors. Many fabrics woven of natural colored cotton in various shades have been found in South America and are beginning to fill our museum collections from that land. It is needless to add that these varieties have long been lost.

onward have noted, namely that the Uto-Aztecan root word "atl" means "water", while the South American "Antees" meaning "Eastern land" could be combined to give Plato's supposedly Egyptian-derived name. Yet if we are to discard the idea of a submerged bench in the direction of the Caribbean, we must account for the old historical trips of Balam-Quiche's son who received the "Sign of Royalty" from the Emperor in the Eastern Land and returned after a long sea voyage toward the rising sun; and we must explain The Chilam Balam.

Yet for all the vividness of its brief descriptions, this ancient document is loaded with hidden and allegorical meanings, which makes it picturesquely Indian, even though as one of the uninitiated, standing outside of the old priesthood, one wishes that the author could have been more explicit. That wish is vain because it is too many milleniums ago that these sonorous phrases were penned. Its style is that of another epoch, from which it comes down a lone survivor—a survivor from a world we can hardly hope to entirely comprehend.

We can recognize from it one striking fact however. From internal evidence, as The Popul Vuh is Nahua, The Chilam Balam is Quiname, for as the former exults over the disasters to the ancestors of the Sea-Empire, the latter mourns. Nor is this all. The Chilam Balam is by far the older, for as The Popul Vuh speaks of the Xihalan monarch who was unwise enough to claim that some of the men who were drowned in The Flood were great, and this statement was made the reason for the plot against him by the First Twins; The Chilam Balam speaks of this ancestral disaster in the words of one who escaped, and in exquisite archaic phrases, paints the beauty and horror of the catastrophe with gripping realism.

Therefore the only thought which remains is gratitude to the fates which spared it intact, untouched by the censoring hand of a later religion which one feels so heavily in the Sagas of The Norse; gratitude to the Quiche priest who rewrote it from memory after he saw the flames devour the priceless original; and gratitude for the merest chance which has brought down to the twentieth century from the mists beyond the corridors of all known history, these ancient words:

"During the Eleventh Ahau Catoun, Ah-Musem-Cab came up from The Underworld in order to close the eyes of The Thirteen Gods. His name is not known. Only his sisters, and his children, whispered it among themselves, but they were not allowed to look upon his face. These things occurred when the earth was to awaken, but then no one knew what was to come.

"The Thirteen Gods were seized by The Nine Gods. And a fiery rain fell, as ashes covered the heavens and trees trembled, crashing to the ground. And Ah-Musem-Cab shook himself, and the trees and rocks were thrown against one another.

"And The Thirteen Gods were seized, and their heads were cut off, and their faces were slapped, and their eyes were closed, and weights were put upon their shoulders. Then the Great Dragon who

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wears the quetzal plumes was ravished from the Heavens, together with the rattles from its tail, and its quetzal feathers.

"And the One-Who-Is-Eternal, covered The Thirteen Gods, and bound everything together and ascended into the Thirteenth Heaven. Then bits of their skin, and pieces of their bones fell here and there upon the earth, but their heart was hidden, because The Thirteen Gods had not wished to leave their children.

"And now came the fury of Ah-Musem Cab. Fiery arrows struck down orphans, and aged ones, widows and little children who wished to go on living, but no longer had the strength for life.

"They ran to the shore-line screaming, where the tumultuous waves poured over them and buried them in the sands. Then cracked open great chasms, which yawned, swallowing falling temples and frantic hordes of running ones. Finally, in one vast, curving, green watery blow, curled back and came all of the ocean.

"And when The Great Serpent had been ravished, the sky began to fall down with steam and fire, and then all of the dry land sank into the engulfing waters. The Four Gods—the Four Bacabs who had held up That Universe had fallen, and everything had been destroyed.

"Those who had escaped, came to their places, knowing the annihilation was finished, and they settled in their places. And a rainbow appeared as a sign that the destruction was over, and a new age was to begin. New civilization struck down

their roots, the great yellow tree, (Mayan color for the south) and the white tree, (Mayan color for the north), and in memory of The Never-Forgotten Destruction, a bird sat upon the yellow tree and the white. And the footsteps of The Southerners echoed throughout the new land. . . ."

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(See page 144)



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